

# THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1810.—VOL. LXXI.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING JANUARY 8, 1898.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"LEONIE, MY DARLING, I HAVE COME TO MAKE YOU HAPPY IF YOU WILL LET ME," SAID ALYMER.

## A LIFE'S REGRET.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

ALYMER ROSSVELL walked slowly over the Cheddar Hills towards the Cliff Hotel, where he with his mother and cousin were spending the sunny weeks of August. He carried a huge bouquet of heather—purple, lavender, and one single spray of rare white, the finding of which it supposed by the Scotch to bring such luck.

As he reached the stile separating the main part of the cliffs from the path leading down to the road, he paused and looked at the scene before him with appreciative eyes.

At the foot of the two ranges of cliffs were the little white cottages comprising the village, so sleepy save for the tourists; the pretty grounds of the hotel with their flower-beds, artificial

fountains and miniature waterfall, the ivy-grown arbours and rustic terraces.

Before him stretched the Mendips, purple in the setting sun, and seeming to melt into the very clouds; and around him on every side was plentiful verdure, lush grass, with nodding harebells and sweet-scented thyme—altogether a scene to make glad one's heart.

The church clock struck six, and he started in some surprise; then vaulting over the stile, began his descent.

Suddenly he paused, shading his eyes with his hand, and looked intently down at a dark object which lay motionless among the harebells and thyme.

Was it a woman? and, if so, why did she lie so motionless, so rigid!

With something like fear in his heart he hastened his steps, slipping, stumbling down the stony way, until he reached the object which had attracted him.

It was a woman, and judging by the slenderness of her form she was young.

Alymer Rossvelk knelt beside her, and called softly to her, but received no response; then he touched her, trying to unclench the small hands in which were grasped harebells and grass, as if she had clutched them in falling.

She lay face downwards, and her head was so muffled in her mantle that Alymer had no idea what manner of creature she was—if she had merely swooned, or if her alliance and rigidity were those of death!

He began to be seriously alarmed, and shouted to some men in the road to come to his assistance, but they were engaged discussing the price of corn and the probable dissolution of the then Government, so that his shouts passed unheeded.

He threw aside his heather, even the rare white spray, and lifted her gently in his arms, resting her head upon his knees.

At the beauty of the face, which then was revealed to him, he was surprised and startled. He removed her close black hat, and masses of yellow hair flooded the stranger's shoulders, and fell about his arms in wild luxuriance.

Her complexion was wholly at variance with the golden waves and curves, being that of a brunette, whilst the curving lashes and finely-marked brows were black as night.

He laid his hand upon her heart, and felt it beating faintly under his palm.

"Thank Heaven," he said, "she is not dead! I must get her down somehow; the mater will know what to do."

He staggered to his feet. He was not a strong man, and the girl, though slender, lay in his arms so supine, so helpless, that it was with considerable difficulty he made his way down the hill-side.

But at last the descent was accomplished, and he reached the road. One or two men volunteered their help then, and asked if the lady had had an accident; but vouchsafing no answer he entered the hotel, where the landlord met him in the hall.

"Oh! Mr. Roswell, what is it!" he asked, with breathless curiosity.

"Are my mother and cousin in? Please open the door for me. I am fatigued, and send Mrs. Roswell to me."

He entered one of the rooms hired by them, and laid his fair burden upon the couch, seating himself beside her. Mrs. Roswell entered hurriedly—a pretty, elderly lady, with a timid manner.

"My dear Aylmer, who is this young lady, and what ails her?"

"That is more than I can tell. I don't think she has had a fall. I saw no bruises. I fancy she has fainted; it has been so hot, you know. As for who she is I am in ignorance, but from her dress and appearance I should say she is a lady."

Mrs. Roswell was down upon her knees, chafing the small hands, which, on being ungloved, were found white as snow, and delicately formed.

"Ring for Irene," she said, at last; "she is so clever a nurse."

Aylmer obeyed, and then went out; and presently a girl of twenty entered. She was fair and sweet to look upon, but her prettiness faded into nothingness beside that wonderful face lying on her aunt's shoulder.

"Mrs. Trethwick has told me all she knew, and so I brought restoratives with me. Now, aunt, bend her head forward—so. Ah! that will do. Now for the smelling salts. How lovely she is!"

For a long time the stranger resisted all their efforts to restore her to consciousness, but at length, with a sigh and a sob, the black lashes lifted, and a pair of wonderful eyes looked with frightened questioning at the two kneeling figures. She pressed one hand to her brow, and said, with the faintest possible foreign accent,—

"What is this place? I thought—I thought—I was on the hill-side."

"You were a short while ago, but my son found you there in a swoon, and carried you down here to us. Pray lie down and rest. I am afraid you are very ill."

The golden head sank back, and through the lowered lashes the slow tears gathered and fell.

"You are very good to me. I can't thank you, but I am not ungrateful. I must go—indeed I must. I have to reach Weston to-night."

"The last train has started already," Irene interposed. "Where is your home? We shall be glad to assist you to it."

"I have no home; but was going to hold an interview with a lady who wants a secretary. I reached Cheddar at noon, and finding I had some time to wait, thought I would see the cliffs. I suppose the heat was too great for me. Did you say I could not get to Weston to-night?"

"Only by driving."

"That would be too expensive," the girl answered, with a contraction of the brow. "Could I not walk the distance?"

"Oh, no; it is several miles, and you are far too weak to attempt one!"

"But," she urged, desperately, "I shall in all probability lose the situation. There are so many applicants, and so few openings."

"My dear," said Mrs. Roswell, whose tender

heart was moved to pity at so much beauty and loveliness, "you must stay here to-night as our guest. Mrs. Trethwick has a spare room, I know."

The tawny eyes of the girl flashed, one swift, passionate glance at the pretty, elderly lady.

"You are most good to me," she said, softly, her voice brushing the words to sweetness. "You make me believe that such a thing as charity still exists!"

"You must have had some bitter experience," Irene remarked, "to speak like that. But just for to-night forget it all. We shall be glad, indeed, if we can in any way give you comfort and pleasure! Ah! you must not refuse to accept what we so frankly offer," as the stranger began to protest; "and in return we will only ask your name!"

The last rays of a setting sun shone full into the tawny eyes until they were almost amber, a bright streak of colour flushed her cheeks, and she answered, tremulously,—

"I am Leonie Templeton—an orphan."

"Then you have a double claim to my pity," Irene said, softly. "I, too, am an orphan, although my aunt does her best to make me forget my losses. Now, we take it for granted you will stay. Where is your luggage?"

"I left it at the station. There is not much of it."

"We will send for it; and now try to rest, and Mrs. Trethwick shall bring you some tea."

Aunt and niece then went into an adjoining room, where dinner was laid for three, and Aylmer entering, the conversation naturally turned upon Leonie Templeton.

"I wonder," Irene mused, "what she will do if she loses this situation by her want of punctuality! Aunt, you said, often lately wished me to have a companion, because it is lonely when Aylmer is away; why not engage Miss Templeton?"

"That is a very good suggestion," Aylmer said, approvingly.

"My dears, you must not jump to such rash decisions. Remember, we know nothing of the young lady, and—and she may not be a fit person for us to associate with."

"That is unlike you, mother; and I suppose she would have some testimonials as to character and ability!"

Mrs. Roswell looked nervous and irresolute.

"Suppose we learn more of her before proposing the thing? And it would be as well for her to go to Weston in the morning. If she satisfies her would-be employer, very well; if not, she can return to us."

Aylmer looked unusually thoughtful. He was not a handsome man by any means, neither was his face indicative of much strength, either physical or mental, but it was pure and gentle; and his quiet, inoffensive manners made him a very general favourite with all.

Now he looked up and said,—

"If you have no objection, mother, I will go to Weston, with Miss Templeton. If she fails in obtaining this situation, pride would doubtless keep her from returning and throwing herself upon the charity of strangers."

"I think your plan the best of any yet proposed. Now suppose we return to her!"

Leonie looked up with a weary smile as they entered. Aylmer took a seat beside her, and began to unfold their plans. She interrupted him with a swift,—

"Oh, no, no! I cannot accept so much kindness from you. How can you tell me that I deserve it? For aught you know to the contrary, I may be an adventurer!"

"I am not afraid to trust my own judgment in your case," the young man answered, smiling down at the beautiful face; "and when you see fit, you will tell us more of yourself."

"There is very little to tell. My parents are dead, and I have no living relatives. My father was an Englishman, and a gentleman; my mother was a Spaniard, and I lived most of my life at Madrid. Recently I acted as secretary to Lady Marsdale, but, as you know, she has gone out to India, and required my services no longer. Her testimonial is the only proof of ability I can give you."

"And that will be all-sufficient. I begin to hope, Miss Templeton, you will find the secretaryship at Weston taken. You would find so happy a home with my mother and cousin."

She half outstretched her little hand in token of her gratitude, but swiftly drew it back, flushing deeply; and in the wonderful tawny eyes there gathered such a look of anguish that the young man was constrained to say,—

"You have known heavy calamities?"

"Yes," she answered, a catch in her breath. "I sometimes wonder I am not mad;" then she added, swiftly, "but the goodness I have received to-day will be like an oasis in my life. Tell me your name, that I may remember it with gratitude in all the years to come."

"I am Aylmer Roswell; my cousin's name is Irene."

"Thank you," and she leaned back among her pillows, whilst the young man watched her with a strange new interest.

She was so lovely, so frail, so different in all her attributes to any woman he had ever seen; and for the first time in his life, his heart quickened with a sense of nameless fascination, the principal element of which was unrest.

Irene's voice broke the sweet dusk silence. At twilight she always sang to her aunt and cousin, and she made no exception now to the rule. The song she chose was one by Howard Crosby, a pretty, pathetic ballad with a refrain:

"Never to meet again love; never until you die;  
Parting I know is sad, love, and you've said your  
last good-bye."

So sang the girl; and in the quickly gathering night Leonie clenched her slim hands, and set her teeth upon her mother lip, to silence the sob which rose from her passionate heart, and strove for utterance. In the silence which followed the song she feared that they would hear her deep-drawn breaths, and prayed like a mad thing for the calmness she so sorely needed. Again Irene broke into a flood of melody. Oh! why must she choose the saddest of songs! Why would she unconsciously torture Leonie's heart with remembrance of dead days—when the man she loved had leaned low over her as she sang that very song in her rich, deep contralto.

"The sun is setting, and the hour is late;  
Once more I stand beside the wicket gate,  
The bells are ringing out the dying day,  
Two children clinging on their homeward way;  
And he is whispering words of sweet intent,  
While I, half doubting, whisper a consent.  
Is this a dream? Then waking would be pain,  
Oh! I do not wake me, let me dream again."

Leonie did not hear the conclusion of that song, because through brain and heart ran the well-remembered accents and words of the companion of that forgotten night. Once more she was in the grand, old room of that Spanish villa, and through the open window she could see the stary blossoms on the orange grove beyond; the sky with its moonlight and myriad stars; the bloom of the cassis breathed spice on the gale, and through it all ran the tremor of a love that feared and hoped and worshipped. She turned her face to the wall, and prayed for death, for the lover of that hour had proved false; had done his bitter best to break her heart—to crush the very life out of her.

When she went to her room, and Mrs. Roswell had left her, she sat down at her open window, and gave herself up to the memories which came crowding upon her. She knew it was vain and foolish, but under the shadows of those majestic lulls she felt her own loneliness and misery more than she had done for many weary weeks. She bowed her face in her hands and wept, so quietly, so hopelessly, that surely, could he see her, even that false lover would be touched to commiseration. After a long, long while she rose, and began to doze; let down the heavy masses of yellow hair, and then threw herself wearily upon her bed.

At last she slept, and did not wake until the sun was well up, and all the hotel a-strir. She went down pale and unrefreshed; for her sleep had been troubled by evil dreams, and Irene exclaimed that she looked unfit for any exertion.



But she insisted upon going to Weston, and begged Aylmer not to accompany her, but this request he would not grant, so they started for the station in one of those queer little conveyances which seem the pride and delight of the natives.

Reaching Weston, Leonie begged Aylmer to wait her return in a narrow, picturesque lane, and went on alone.

He seated himself on a bank, and, drawing out a copy of "Uncle Remus," endeavoured to while away the time by reading.

But the queer stories failed to interest him; his thoughts would stray to Leonie with a persistency that almost angered him.

What was she to him that he should be so absorbed in her! For aught he knew she might be, as she said, an adventuress, and yet he could not connect deceit or guile with that weary, beautiful face, or believe that rich voice could utter paltry falsehoods.

He did not wait very long for her return. Hearing steps along the road he looked up, and saw her coming towards him, slowly and dispiritedly.

"You have not succeeded!" he asked, pathetically.

"No, I am too late," she answered, wearily, and sat down on the bank at a little distance from him.

He was conscious of a great pleasure in her failure as he leaned towards her.

"Then you will let me take you back to my mother?"

"There is nothing else left me to do; to live I must work."

"We will do our best to make you happy," more eagerly than he usually spoke; "and, of course, if you do not like your duties, you can seek other employment."

"Yes; let us go now. Our train is nearly due."

They walked back together, and reaching Cheddar, found Irene waiting them on the platform.

"I had a presentiment that you would come back to us. I am very glad, Miss Templeton!"

"I hardly know whether to be glad or sorry!" Leonie answered. "I am so afraid that I shall disappoint you."

Irene laughed.

"I think that is scarcely possible," then turning to Aylmer, "we have received such good news since you left us. Mr. Maxwell has written to auntie, saying he shall join us to-morrow, and I am almost mad with delight to think what glorious times we shall have. We can picnic on the cliffs, and do the caves together; then there are so many places of interest around Cheddar. Do you know the locality at all Miss Templeton?"

"No; I have never been in Somersetshire before. I came yesterday from Taunton."

"Oh! then we can promise you a great deal of pleasure," said Aylmer, "and my friend Maxwell's coming is just the thing. My mother does so little walking or climbing, so that without him we should be an awkward number. When a party counts three only, one is sure to be left out in the cold."

"Suppose we go into luncheon now; afterwards we can initiate Miss Templeton into the ways and wonders of Cheddar Valley."

Miss Roswell received them kindly, and when the meal was ended had an interview with Leonie, which ended in her being engaged as Irene's companion, Mrs. Roswell having declared herself satisfied with Lady Marshall's testimonial.

The girl was evidently agitated, and on hearing her new friend's decision, caught her hands with a pretty half-foreign gesture and kissed them.

"You have saved me from despair!" she said, and her tawny eyes glistened gratefully through her tears. "Oh! I hope—I pray you will never regret your goodness."

"I think I shall not do that, child," Mrs. Roswell said, gently. "Now go and join Irene—that is, if you're not too tired for walking."

Aylmer decided it was too hot for very arduous climbing, so they walked along the narrow winding road, lying so white and smooth between the two ranges of rugged cliffs, and Irene pointed out all the wonders of the place—the Sugar-loaf

Rock, and the Lion Rocks, and tried to discover the Ivy Chair, but failed.

As they passed by the low, white cottages women ran out and accosted them with "Tea, ladies! Best accommodation, and only ninepence," or "sixpence," as the case might be; others exhibited stoves and ferns, and followed them long distances up the road. But these were only minor troubles, and Irene was very much inclined to laugh them away.

"We won't visit the stalactite caves until Theo—Mr. Maxwell, comes."

The cousins were so kindly, so attentive, that Leonie's depression lifted, and she found herself chatting more cheerfully than she had done for many a long day. The walking had heightened her colour, and her strange eyes had grown brighter.

Aylmer looked at her with increasing admiration, and found himself giving almost exclusive attention to her words. Once Irene, who was walking a little in advance, turned, and said, frankly,—

"Yesterday, Miss Templeton, I thought you lovely, but I never realised how beautiful you are until now. You remind me of a picture I once saw."

Leonie flushed hotly, and said, with a nervous laugh,—

"Your candour is novel, and, pardon me, a trifle amusing."

"Yes; Irene would never make a diplomatist, she is far too open. I think that, perhaps, is her chief charm. Decoit in a woman is even more repugnant than in a man."

The bright flush died out of Leonie's face.

"I cannot agree with you, Mr. Roswell; but in either it is bad, and productive always of ill."

She spoke in such a changed voice that involuntarily Aylmer glanced at her, and for a moment a fear assailed him that perhaps this woman was not all she seemed; then he almost hated himself for his doubts of her.

"Perhaps you are right, Miss Templeton," and turned lightly to another subject.

The following day Theodore Maxwell arrived, and was greeted with effusion. He was a handsome young fellow of five-and-twenty, well-born, rich, and talented; proud of his name, intolerant to vice and folly; perhaps too much so, as his intolerance sometimes made his judgments very bitter and merciless. But on the whole he was a great favourite with society, a still greater one with the Roswells, and it was rumoured he had a marked penchant for pretty Irene, which she fully reciprocated.

When the young men sat together in the hotel grounds Theodore said, removing his cigar from his mouth,—

"What a handsome girl Miss Templeton is! Who is she? She looks as though she had a story."

"So she has," and Aylmer proceeded to tell the circumstances under which they became acquainted.

"I never saw beauty of so wonderful and fascinating a type. Verily, her eyes are positively amber when the light rests on them, and if she would only smile more often—be less reticent—she would be dangerous to most fellows' peace of mind."

"I don't know that I should like her altered in any particular. She is simply perfect as she is."

Theodore looked curiously at him.

"Should not wonder if you're caught at last," he said, half smiling. "I never heard you praise any girl so highly. Am I to wish you luck?"

Aylmer's somewhat sensitive face flushed.

"You forget," he said, gravely. "I had never met Miss Templeton until two days ago, and I certainly don't believe in love at first sight."

"I would not go so far as that. It is not the rule, certainly, but it is the 'exception that proves the rule.' But your cousin and the lady in question are about to join us," and, throwing away his cigar, he went forward to meet the two girls.

Irene welcomed him with a smile, and a blush. Leonie with a faint bow. He placed himself between them, but addressed himself almost

entirely to Irene, for it seemed to him Miss Templeton did not wish to talk. She was very silent all that afternoon, and Theodore Maxwell found himself very often speculating in his own mind about her past life, and what was the cause of her melancholy.

"It could not be a recreant lover," he thought. "Surely no man could be false to so lovely a creature!"

In the twilight Aylmer proposed strolling, and Irene gave them all their favourite ballads. Then it was Leonie's turn, and after a momentary pause she broke into a lovely Spanish song, the words of which she had that day translated for them.

Perhaps none of them were quite prepared for such exquisite melody as filled the room then. The liquid notes of that wonderful contralto held them silent—stirred the very depths of their hearts.

Theodore Maxwell, who was no mean musician, leaned nearer, and strove to see the singer's face, but the twilight hid it from him; only it seemed to him that there was anguish there, and that the tawny eyes were tear-filled.

When she had ended he sat quite silent, Aylmer stirred uneasily, as if he feared the sudden stillness would be too rudely broken, but Irene said, swiftly and softly,—

"I think I shall never sing again; you have made me dissatisfied with my own performance."

Perhaps she hoped that Theodore would assure her singing was good; but he made no remark, and she felt a trifle disappointed, until Aylmer clasped her hand kindly.

"My dear, your voice is very pretty, but we must not expect all to be born nightingales."

She laughed, and begged Leonie to give them just one more song—"only one."

The girl complied, and the haunted words and melody of "Our Last Waltz" filled the little room.

After that conversation became general, and at an early hour each retired to his or her own room, Theodore Maxwell looking puzzled and ill at ease.

"I can't account to myself for my folly in being so completely fascinated; I am a greater fool than I believed myself to be. I wonder if little Irene really cares for me; to-night I am inclined to hope she does not." He paced impatiently up and down his room. "It must be her marvellous voice which has cast such a spell over me; to-morrow I shall be my usual sober self."

And yet, when he lay down to sleep, the face that haunted him was Leonie's, and not Irene's; the eyes which seemed to burn into his very soul were tawny, and not brown.

He rose in the morning with an uncomfortable sense that he had not control over brain and heart, a restless longing to meet Leonie again, and to hear her voice call him by his name.

"What fools we men are!" he said, savagely, and went downstairs.

## CHAPTER II.

THE days passed swiftly and pleasantly with the little party at the Cliff Hotel. There were so many excursionists in the place, every six days out of seven, that they had plenty of food for amusement and speculation.

Leonie was most fond of wandering over the cliffs, and seemed, despite her apparent fragility, never to be tired of the rough climbing. She had a steady head, a light and sure foot; she needed no help along the stony ways, and her companions regarded her with wondering admiration, of which she was singularly unconscious.

Theodore Maxwell spent much time in thinking of her beauty, and marvelling what it would be if the cloud could for an instant be lifted from her face, and the sadness leave those wonderful eyes of hers.

She never spoke of the past or her friends, never referred to her former life, even indirectly, and he felt there was a mystery about her which it would be well to solve before he committed himself to any declaration of love, for it had come to that with him.

His past liking for Irene was all forgotten; his thoughts, his heart, his love were all with and for her companion.

Irene saw that with a pang, but she said nothing, only nursed her grief in silence, which was not wholly unmixed with anger against Theodore, and tried to be satisfied with Aymer's society.

"He is always gentle and good to me," she said to herself, as she sat alone, "but he, too, is engrossed by Leonie. Oh! if only I were beautiful!"

From various causes they delayed visiting the stalactite caves, until Leonie had been with them rather more than a fortnight; and at last Aymer said it would be well to make a special arrangement to do so, or they would lose the pleasure entirely, as they were leaving in a few days for Clevedon.

So on a bright morning they walked down to the cave, which goes by the name of its proprietor, a certain man yclept Cox; each was provided with a tiny lamp, the guide carrying half-a-dozen of the same fixed on a kind of tray at the end of a pole.

There was a chain passing up some of the chambers, to aid the steps of the uninitiated, and Irene, neglecting to remove her gloves, had them literally worn from her hands by the friction of the links as she grasped them.

She went first with Aymer, Leonie following with Theodore.

"This is very strange, Miss Templeton!" said the latter. "What wonderful formations these are!" touching a huge stalactite as he spoke.

"Yes," she answered, "and how weird it all is! The lights which scarcely serve to break the gloom, the chill, damp air, the utter isolation—it is like a scene from the Arabian Nights."

"Or one might imagine we were in the Catacombs!"

The guide here turned.

"Please stoop very low, or your heads will suffer."

And they proceeded in single file, going almost upon "all fours." But emerging into the next chamber they found it very large, and very lofty. The stalactites, too, had formed themselves into all fantastic shapes. There was the parson in the pulpit, a poulterer's shop, a loaf of bread; and, more wonderful still, a number of projections which, on being struck lightly with a stick, produced all the various notes of a peal of bells.

The guide then proceeded to another chamber in which were little pools of water, giving fine reflections when a lamp was held over their darkness. Leonie was about to follow in Irene's wake when Theodore caught her hand, and arrested her.

Trembling she turned to him, and even in that dim light he saw she was ghastly white.

"I have frightened you," he said, in a whisper; "but why should the knowledge of my love make you afraid?"

"Hush," she said, sharply and tremulously. "You have no right to address me in this way. I cannot listen to you."

"Why?" he questioned, abruptly. "You are more dear to me than I can tell. I have not known you long, it is true, but I love you with all my heart. Will you be my wife, Leonie?"

A bright flush stole to her cheeks, but it died quickly out.

"You do not mean this," she said, tremulously. "Oh! it is cruel to trifle with me! I am so helpless, so altogether at your mercy—an unknown, friendless girl, you rich in all that the world prizes. This is unmanly, Mr. Maxwell."

"You are making yourself unhappy without a cause, Leonie. I love you—I want you for my wife. What answer will you give me, darling?"

Then Aymer's voice called them, and she snatched her hand from his.

"Let us join them," she said, agitatedly. "You—you have surprised me;" but from her manner Theodore derived hope that his suit would be successful.

He had thrown everything to the winds—all

thoughts of friends, and rank, and wealth for her sake—and surely she would not turn a deaf ear to his prayer! He followed her with a comparatively light heart, and contrived by his gay badinage to distract attention from her.

She was heartily glad when they all issued from the cave, and pleading a headache she hastened to the hotel, and up to her own room. Then it was strange that she should fall on her knees, and weep in a quiet, but heart-broken way, and pray in a whisper that Heaven would help her to do the thing that was right! There was no exultation in her heart that she had won an honest man's love, and only bitterest woe in her eyes and in her voice, although she cried again and again,—

"I love him. Oh! how I love him!"

She rose suddenly, and taking a lock of curly brown hair from a tiny case kissed it many times, looked down upon it with fond eyes, and at a pictured face.

"My darling! my darling!" she whispered again, "forgive me, I am a most unhappy woman."

In vain Theodore endeavoured to waylay her that day. She persistently avoided him; would on no account be left with him. He attributed her avoidance to a girl's natural shyness, and never for a moment guessed that she was terribly afraid of herself—that she was not strong enough then to answer, save as her heart dictated.

The next day came, and Mrs. Roswell began to prepare for the journey to Clevedon, Leonie persisted in lightening her labours; packed the trunks dexterously, and seemed anxious to stay by her. It was not until the evening that Theodore found her alone in the hotel gardens. She turned to re-enter the house, but he stood before her, and barred the way.

"This has gone on long enough, Leonie," he said, firmly. "I have been very patient, but I must have my answer now. Come with me to some place where we can be quiet."

The authority in his voice and manner were not without effect; she moved on by his side mechanically, and they mounted to a natural terrace where were some small and ivy-covered arbours. Selecting one the furthest removed from the gardens, Theodore motioned her to enter. There were a few folks below, laughing and chatting beside the fountains, but, to all intents and purposes, they were alone. Leonie sank upon the stone seat, her hands clasped tightly about her knees, and her eyes downcast. The young man sat down beside her, and sought to possess himself of her hands, but she was afraid lest his touch should make her weak, and so repulsed him. He heard her quick drawn breaths, saw the flitting colour come and go in her exquisite face, and his heart beat high with hope.

"Leonie, my darling, what will you say to me?" he questioned.

Her voice was so low when she answered as to be almost inaudible.

"You have honoured me too far, Mr. Maxwell; and you have known me so short a time that you cannot be sure of the feeling you entertain for me in love. It would be base to take advantage of your generosity and implicit trust."

"Not love?" he cried with a half laugh. "Why Leonie, you little witch, what else is it that has made my days and nights restless and anxious, filled my thoughts with you, stirred me to keener, quicker life! Love," and he leaned nearer, "what is your reply?"

"You know nothing of me or of my past," she urged lamely.

"I know enough to be sure there is nothing shameful in your life; with that certainty I am content."

How white she was! how hardly she breathed! Below, the fountains tinkled and the little waterfall brawled on; the breath of mignonette came to them on the soft evening air, and from the cliffs there echoed the sound of gay laughter and merry speech. It seemed to the woman who heard and saw these things that she was going mad. Suddenly she rose, and with a swift gesture that spoke only of despair she said,—

"It cannot be as you wish, Mr. Maxwell, I—I thank you for the honour you have done me, but I cannot marry you. Say no more on the subject, please."

He, too, had risen, and now he grasped her firmly by the wrists and forced her to look at him.

"I will not accept this repulse," he said, as lowly as she herself had spoken. "I love you, and will win you despite all opposition. I will not believe that you are indifferent to me, Leonie; but why if you love me do you send me away!"

Her voice was broken with sobs as she answered,—

"You do not understand, and I cannot, dare not explain. Oh! pray believe I can never give you any other reply than I now give."

"Do you suppose I will quietly accept this rejection without receiving some valid reason for it? My darling, why will you be so cruel to yourself and me, for I know you love me!"

Below, the waterfall brawled heedlessly on, and the happy lovers bent laughing and whispering over the tickling fountains. The girl looked out one moment with strange eyes; then suddenly she bowed her head and wept as one whose heart is breaking.

"Let me alone," she said; "I love you. Oh! yes, yes! I love you! Be content with that knowledge. Go away! oh, go away! How cruel you are to me!"

He threw his arms about her, and kissed her again and again.

"You have confessed you love me, and I will never let you go. Tell me what obstacle there is in your fancy to our union! My darling heart, nothing can change or kill my passion for you—nothing short of your own actual and personal disgrace."

She shivered, though the flower-laden breeze was so warm.

"Be merciful," she pleaded. "I—I am ill, and in your hands as weak as water; show me some compassion."

He released her.

"I will not press my suit unduly," he said, "I will give you time for reflection. I am going to Clevedon with the Roswells, after that I join my own family. I shall not see you again until November—you shall give me a different answer then."

"Oh!" she wailed, "why will you indulge in foolish hopes! However long you wait—even if until we are both old—I should give you no other reply. Forget the words you have spoken, as I pray you will soon forget me. Why cannot you love a woman your family would approve? Why could you not think of Miss Roswell?"

He flushed slightly at the mention of Irene, but said swiftly,—

"I have chosen once and for all. It is hard (and you must understand that) to wait so long for you, but the thought that you will in the end be my own will make the time seem short. Now, love, kiss me before you leave me—it is not much to ask!"

She hesitated a moment, then went close to him.

"Yes," she said, "I will kiss you now, whilst your heart is tender towards me—kiss you for the first and the last time. Oh! my dear, my dear!—the last, last time!"

She wound her arms about his neck, and drew down his head to her own level. She laid her lips to his then, whilst a bitter sob broke from her. She tried to speak but failed. She clung about him in a very madness of woe, because she knew only too well that this was the only moment in all her life when she might show him her love.

"If ever," she said, faintly, "if ever you learn that of me which shall disappoint and amaze you, and estrange your heart from me, try not to condemn me too bitterly—make allowance for my loneliness and my youth."

"Tell me what you mean by these dark sayings and strange hints," he answered, hoarsely. "Surely, surely you have been guilty of no crime. You, who seem all gentleness, can have wronged no other creature."

"I have wronged no one," wearily; "ask me



no more. Now I am going, and I pray you always to remember that as I have given you no encouragement in the past so I give you no hope for the future. I am so placed that I must live and die alone."

Without another word she turned and left him.

Just for a little while a doubt of her goodness and her purity troubled his peace; but the memory of her beautiful face, with its wistful and haunting eyes, upbraided him for his momentary suspicion.

"She is morbid," he thought, "and has known great sorrow, but she is a good woman. Perhaps some of her people may have been guilty of a criminal offence; but what have I to do with them? I shan't marry the aunts and uncles!" with a slight smile, and he did not once despair of eventually winning Leonie to his desire.

That night, when he sat with Aylmer, he broke a short silence by saying,—

"I think it only right to tell you, Russell, that to-night I asked Miss Templeton to be my wife!"

In the pause that followed Aylmer looked from the window, and but for the dim light Theodore would have seen the pale face had grown paler, and the lips twitched nervously.

"Have you nothing to say?" Theodore questioned, somewhat impatiently.

"What answer did Miss Templeton give you?"

"She refused me emphatically. But I don't despair, because she confessed at the same time she loved me, and her rejection is only caused by some scruples she has concerning her past."

"If it is for her happiness," Aylmer said, slowly and painfully, "that she should marry you I trust you will overlook her scruples."

His voice was so laboured, so heavy, his manner so changed, that Theodore suddenly leaned forward, and laying his hand upon his friend's arm, said,—

"Do not let me think I am your rival, old boy!"

"You are not that," steadily, "for I never have had any hope of winning her; but that I love her—yes, that is true."

"I am very sorry," Theodore muttered, feeling how commonplace his words sounded, "but you will get over it, Russell—all men do."

Aylmer smiled.

"Not all men—I am not likely to forget my love or transfer it to any other woman. Talk of something else."

In the morning he and Irene went out across the cliffs, and then Aylmer began to tell her the story he had heard the previous night. He was afraid to look at her, because he knew what feeling she entertained for Theodore.

She heard him very quietly, but now and again a little sob caught her breath, and he saw that her hands were clenched in her effort to stifle her emotion and her pain. When he finished he touched her gently.

"My dear," he said, "we must comfort each other; for I too, love her, and he will one day win her for himself. Perhaps it is better so," but he sighed heavily.

"I knew that early or late this blow must fall," Irene said, tremulously, "although I tried to deceive myself with hopes which I knew were delusive; only—only, I could not bear to tell myself the truth. Oh, Aylmer! it is hard that she should have all the good things and I none. We have all played to cross purposes, and—and the game has not proved pleasant."

Then her eyes flashed, and her voice grew sharper with her pain and her memory of bygone days.

"He did love me once," she cried, bitterly, "and did his best to make me return his affection! How cruel men are—how careless, how they wound us!"

And then, suddenly, her composure deserted her utterly, and she clung, weeping, to his arm.

"I wish I had never seen him! I wish she had never come among us! I was happy until then."

"Aylmer soothed her as best he might; and when she had grown calmer, said anxiously,—

"You will not allow this to make any difference in your regard for Leonie?"

"You can't expect me to feel any great affection for her under these circumstances; but I will do my best to hide any change there may be in me from her. It is not her fault (I know) that Theodore has—has deserted me. Oh, that I had one half her beauty!"

"My dear, you are very pretty."

"Pretty!" scornfully, "in a simple, commonplace way that has failed to please him. Let us go back, Aylmer; I have no heart for anything. It seems as if the world has changed suddenly. I used to find it so pleasant, and now I hate it."

"The pain will grow less with time, my dear. You must be patient."

### CHAPTER III.

EVENTS, which none of them could foresee, kept the Rosvelles and Theodore Maxwell apart until the London season had begun. In the meanwhile life had gone on smoothly (at least apparently so) with them all.

But Leonie was conscious that the affection Irene had once had for her had sunk into indifference, which might in its turn grow into dislike. Mrs. Roswell was invariably kind, but she was a woman of little character, and Leonie often thought if Irene chose she could turn her aunt against her.

Aylmer was the only one on whom she could rely for real friendship, real help. His gentle nature, his quiet, unassuming manners won her liking and esteem, and she would have been sorry indeed to forfeit his affection.

She lived a secluded life, seeing very little society; that was her own wish. She had no heart to be gay, to enter into the pleasures and frivolities usually so dear to the young and beautiful; and another consideration was that her wardrobe, though neat and good, was unsuited to any festivity.

Irene often wondered how she spent her very liberal salary, for she seemed to buy no little fineries, did not attempt to replenish her wardrobe.

"She must be of a miserly disposition," thought the girl, a trifle scornfully. "Ah, well, that matters nothing to me."

She did not like the evident mystery in Leonie's life; she wondered why she refused to speak of the last three years, and would only talk freely of her childhood. She longed to know the reason of her sadness—why her wonderful beauty should be marred by melancholy. But she did not dare to ask. Leonie had a way of checking curiosity, and looking down the questioner.

Things were like this when early April came, and one morning Leonie found herself alone with Aylmer in the breakfast-room.

He had been chatting to her in his kindly, pleasant way, when suddenly she turned to him, and said,—

"Why are you always so good to me?"

The answer he made leapt unbidden to his lips.

"It is because I love you, Leonie."

She shrank back from him, a look of pain and fear upon her face. Her strange eyes had deepened and darkened, and she trembled greatly.

"Oh, hush!" she said, "you should not have told me this."

"I was silent," he answered, regarding her wistfully, "I was silent so long that I hoped always to remain so. I must have been mad to tell you what you are to me. But, Leonie, my darling, this shall make no difference to our friendship! I have always loved you, but in such a hopeless fashion that I never dreamed that any reward could be mine. So now let us resume the old friendly relations, or rather, as I cannot be nearer and dearer to you, let me be your brother, your protector, until such time as you go to Maxwell."

"I shall never marry him or any man," she said, steadily. "And, oh! had I known that you would suffer for my most unworthy sake I would have gone away long since!"

"That would not have helped me," smiling sadly. "I loved you from the first. My dear, I should not have spoken to you of my love; but a man cannot always control his impulses, or crush down his passions. So forgive me, dear, and promise not to trust me less. I should like to know that in any trouble you would come to me unhesitatingly for help—that you would feel I could not fail you!"

"Oh, I do feel that," she cried, and catching his hands in hers covered them with her tears and kisses. "I would thank you on my knees for all your goodness, all your love; I would suffer much to prove my gratitude! Heaven bless you!—oh, Heaven bless you!"

She seemed to shiver away from him then, and there was a wild look in the amber eyes. He let her go, and she moved to an open window.

He did not seek to follow her. He stood where she had left him, gazing at her with yearning love. Presently she turned to him.

"Oh, my friend—my friend! what shall I say to you! Tell me, is it pain for you to see me day by day, to meet me at every hour! And, oh! if it is so, I will go away, and by absence try to repair the harm I have unwittingly done."

"By so doing you would make my life most miserable. I should reproach myself, because I had robbed you of a home and friends. No, my dear, let me look on your face, and hear your voice, anticipate and minister to your wants until you leave my care for Theodore's."

"How unlike a man you are in your unselfishness!" she cried. "Oh, I will be all obedience to your wishes; your pleasure shall be mine."

He moved towards her, and stood beside her. How fair she was, this woman who was not for him—and how sad! What misery had he ever seen like to that which darkened her eyes, and shadowed her face!

He took her small ringless hands in his. He held them fast, and as he pressed them in his own he registered a silent vow never to leave or forsake her, never to love her less—to give up his whole life, if need were, to do her service.

Then he stooped and kissed the trembling fingers, and murmured some words that seemed to bless her, and before she could speak in gratitude and thanks he was gone. She sank into a chair, and covered her eyes, and moaned like one in pain.

The sun shone upon the golden glory of her hair, the warm soft tints of her complexion lit lovingly upon her bowed form; but she seemed unconscious of warmth and light as she crouched there praying and weeping, imploring that Theodore would forget her, for she felt that to refuse him a second time would be almost beyond her strength.

Then she cried on Aylmer. It seemed to her in that hour that he was the beneficent spirit of her life—her guardian angel.

Then she thought of another, who lived by her labour, who was near and dear to her, and had such a just claim upon her love and care.

"It would be best for us both," she said in her heart, "if we were dead. The world is too full of sorrow and wrong to give any heed to ours. I wish we were dead!—oh, with all my soul, I wish it!"

Two days later Theodore Maxwell presented himself at Mrs. Roswell's town house. He wore the look of a confident wooer, but showed some embarrassment when Irene entered the room where he was.

She, however, quickly relieved his confusion by greeting him in a most matter-of-fact way, and he could not guess that afterwards she went away to weep as if her heart would break.

He did not see Leonie until the following day, when Aylmer contrived they should be alone. There was such evident fear in her eyes that he said,—

"I shall not press you for an answer to-day; it would be unfavourable."

She made a gesture of weariness.

"You have not forgotten, Mr. Maxwell!"

"I told you I should not. I do not easily change; and I know that as you loved me once you love me now. Why are you so afraid of me?"

"I am not afraid of you, but of myself. You are so strong, I am so weak, and all my heart cries out for you. But oh! believe me, that, if you wait for a lifetime, I will give you no answer different to the one I gave at Cheddar."

"I am not faint-hearted; I can wait and hope."

Then Mrs. Roswell entered, and there was no further opportunity for speech.

Two or three days wore by, and then Theodore had occasion to go to Stoke Newington. He had transacted his business and was walking towards the Dalston Junction when he saw a figure before him which looked strangely like Leonie.

He hastened his steps and strove to overtake the girl; he caught the gleam of golden hair underneath the large black hat, and felt assured none but Leonie could boast such rippling masses. He was surprised to see her in the neighbourhood, but glad to think he would have her to himself for a time. And just when he was so sure of overtaking her she paused a moment at a door, then, opening it, disappeared.

He was bewildered; Leonie had no friends, what was she doing here? The house was small, but neat and clean. He walked up and down a long while, but the girl he had followed did not reappear; and at last he persuaded himself he was mistaken, and taking train returned to the more fashionable quarter of London.

He went at once to the Roswells, and was there told that Leonie had been out two or three hours. His heart sank with undefined fear.

He would have been considerably astonished could he have seen how she was employed at that very hour. She was sitting on a rug before a fire in a small room; one arm was thrown about a beautiful boy, apparently between two and three years old; with her right hand she was building up a house of bricks. A little removed from them sat an old woman, looking on with sad and pitying eyes.

"He grows, Miss Leonie, doesn't he?" she said, after a pause.

"Yes; and he is so bright and bonny. Oh, nurse, nurse! if he were only like other children! He is so beautiful, so winning, he should be happy. But there is no such thing as happiness in this world."

"Poor child!" said the old woman, leaning forward and smoothing Leonie's hair with tender hand. Poor child! you have found it hard enough."

The girl seemed not to heed her; she suddenly caught the boy in her arms and kissed him many times.

"Oh, Lenny, Lenny! my darling, my poor darling! Bailey, he knows me only as the 'pretty lady'; and when he grows up perhaps he will hate me."

"No, no, my pretty one, that can never be. Cheer up, Miss Leonie, there must be better times before you; and one day Lenny will be a comfort to you. Oh, that your poor father had lived!"

"I say that to myself a hundred times a day; and mamma, dear mamma, who never gave me a harsh word. Oh! thank Heaven she died before—before—"

"Say no more, love; I understand what you mean."

Leonie felt the pressure of two small arms about her neck, and a little warm face laid against her cheek.

"Way oo cry! Is oo ill?" asked Master Lenny, in his childish voice.

Leonie lifted his face between her hands and looked intently into it.

"I am not ill, darling, only very sorry because I must leave you soon." She turned her beautiful eyes towards Bailey. "Look at him well, Bailey; thank Heaven there is not a trace of his father in him. Oh! if I thought he would live to follow his vices, break some woman's heart, and leave her to her shame—as his father did—as his father did—I think I could kill him now and here, despite his loveliness and winsome ways. Now, Lenny, let me put away the bricks and undress you; it is time for bed."

And then she took him on her knees and her bright hair mingled with his dark curls.

When she had taken off and folded his clothes she bade him kneel down, and lifting his tiny hands between her own, murmured the words of a childish prayer, which he repeated in a small, clear treble.

Then she lifted him in her arms, and carried him upstairs, where was a dainty white cot. She laid him in it, and, kissing him many times, turned away weeping quietly.

Downstairs she regained her calmness, and, taking out her purse, tendered Mrs. Bailey some money.

The old woman drew back with a hurt look.

"Why will you always insist upon paying me, Miss Leonie, for what is a labour of love? I have enough for his wants and for mine."

Leonie shook her head.

"You must keep to my terms, nurse, or I must place him elsewhere; and then I should fret bitterly, not knowing how he would be treated. Now, good-bye, and I will come again as soon as I dare. Oh! Heaven bless you for all your kindness."

Then they kissed each other, and Leonie left the house, hastening away in the direction of Dalston Junction.

It was almost dark when she reached the Roswells, and a cold rain had begun to fall sharply; drenched and wet, she crept away to her room, meeting Mrs. Roswell on the stairs.

"You are very late, Miss Templeton!" she said, in a tone of mild rebuke. "Aylmer has been anxious about you. Please make haste down, as we are waiting dinner."

Leonie ran away, and presently appeared in the dining-room, pale but composed. Her eyes were very weary, her voice languid, and Aylmer, leaning towards her, said,—

"You have exerted yourself too greatly. Another day, when you wish to take a long excursion, you must have the carriage out."

The tears sprang to her eyes, and she could not look at him.

"Oh," she said, faintly, "I don't deserve such kindness and consideration, but it is pleasant to receive it."

"Aylmer," said Irene, "Mr. Maxwell came here this afternoon. He says his cousin is about to return home, and he hopes to bring him here next week. He has been absent from England five years."

"If his cousin resembles Theodore he will find much favour with us."

The next morning Theodore presented himself again at the house, and had a few moments *à la vie* with Leonie.

"I was at Stoke Newington yesterday," he said, watching her intently.

The hot colour leapt to her face, but she merely remarked that it was a "growing place," and continued her work.

"You speak as though you had some acquaintance with the suburb?"

"I am not wholly ignorant of it," and then she met his eyes steadily.

Surely, he thought, despite her mysterious manner, she had nothing of moment to conceal. So he said, airily,—

"By the bye, I started yesterday on a wild-goose chase. Going to the Junction I saw before me a lady, whose figure and carriage made me for a time imagine she was you. I followed her, but she disappeared into a small house."

Just a slight pause, then Leonie said, quietly,—

"I think you were not mistaken. I went to Stoke Newington in the afternoon to visit some friends."

"I thought I understood you had no friends?"

"That being the case you should congratulate me upon the fact that I am not wholly desolate," she remarked, carelessly.

And she knew when she looked into his face that her candid had helped her more than any subterfuge would have done, and that his old trust in her was restored.

But when he was gone, and she was alone again, she hid her face upon her work, and cried out that she was a wicked woman, and a hypocrite, and prayed for strength to fight out the battle before her.

The days wore by slowly, and Theodore did not come again until a week had passed. Leonie was unfeignedly thankful for the respite his absence gave her from wearying conflicts and fears.

It seemed to her sometimes that her courage and resolution must break down, and then she would think would it not be best to leave the shelter of Aylmer's roof, to go away to some place where they could never find her again; only at the last her heart would fail her because of Lenny, so she stayed.

One day, when she had been on a shopping expedition for Mrs. Roswell, she met Irene issuing from the house.

"What a pity you were absent this morning?" the latter said, a trifle maliciously. "Mr. Maxwell has been here with his cousin; the former seemed disappointed at finding you not at home."

Leonie ignored her last words, and questioned carelessly,—

"Does the latter realise your expectations?"

"Yes, and no. He is undeniably handsome, but I dislike him," and she passed on.

There was no confidence between the girls, so that during the day neither referred to either Theodore or his cousin; but when they were all sitting in the dusky drawing-room that evening Aylmer said, suddenly,—

"Mother, I've invited a couple of friends to dine with us to-morrow. I hope you have no other engagement!"

"Oh, no. And who are your friends, my dear?"

"Only Maxwell and Fergus Darrell. By the way, Irene, the latter admires you greatly."

There came a low, but exceedingly bitter, cry from Leonie's distant corner; it startled them all, and when it was followed by a sob, Aylmer started forward.

"Leonie—Miss Templeton—are you ill?"

"Yes, yes," and she staggered to her feet, her hand pressed hard against her side. "Do not touch me, don't speak, let me go to my room."

Oh, the anguish in her lovely voice! Oh, the agony on the white face not even the gloaming could hide!

She tried to reach the door, but trembled so greatly she seemed about to fall. Aylmer passed his arm about her, and helped her on her way. Outside her room he paused. She offered him no thanks, only shrunk away, with her hand upon the latch.

"I will send Mrs. Roswell to you," he said. "I am afraid you are very ill; you must really have advice."

She forced a smile.

"No, no; to-morrow I shall be well. It is only an old—a very old pain. Don't trouble Mrs. Roswell to come up—I am best alone," so she went in and closed the door behind her. When the sound of his steps had died away she threw herself upon her bed, and set her teeth hard to keep down the shrieks that rose from her heart, and sought to escape her lips.

She rolled and writhed in her lonely anguish, and at first could find no word to say, no prayer to pray. She looked her future in the face and saw that it was evil; but even in that hour, when a voice whispered within her that the time would soon come when Theodore should hate and despise her as then he loved her, her thoughts turned to Lenny, the little one, who was so helpless without her.

At last she sat up, and pushed the heavy hair from her brow.

"Oh!" she said, in an intense whisper, "he has found me—he, my enemy and Lenny's! Oh, is my sin so great there is no forgiveness for me!—no peace or joy in all the days to come! Heaven have mercy upon me!" and, moaning, she hid her face in her hands. "Oh!" she murmured, "that I should hate him now as once I loved him! He is cruel and false; but surely, surely, for the sake of the old days and because of the evil he has wrought, he will keep my secret, and not drive me from my pleasant home!"

Then she thought of the days in the long ago past when she had been afraid of her own happiness; when she had worshipped the man she now loathed and feared; when she had been his



love, his slave, waiting upon his every look and gesture with mute and tender observance.

Oh, the irony of fate! that the man she had loved and the man she now loved should be connected by ties of blood, and that even friendship between herself and Theodore was now impossible!

She began to wonder if the Rossvells suspected the reason of her sudden indisposition, and how long it would be before they heard her story, and drove her with scorn from their midst!

She need not have feared; her friends did not connect her illness with the mention of Fergus Darrell's name. Mrs. Rossvell only said "It was a great pity Miss Templeton was so very delicate;" and whilst Aylmer thought yearningly of her, she knelt in her silent room, her lips pressed close to Lenny's pictured face, her tears falling fast on that one little lock of hair!

#### CHAPTER IV.

The next day she lived in terror. Early in the morning she despatched a note to Mrs. Bailey, telling her briefly what had happened.

"MR DEAR NURSE,—He is in England, and has been introduced to my employer; he dines here to-day. If he discloses my secret there will be nothing left for me to do but to return to you, until I can get work elsewhere. I will not trouble you by telling you of my misery; but, oh! as you love me, pray for me. Kiss my darling for me, and believe me always your grateful child,

"LEONIE."

Day wore to evening, and the dining-room was ablaze with lights. Leonie had tried to excuse herself from appearing, but Mrs. Rossvell seemed so vexed that she dared not press the point. So she went down first, hoping Fergus Darrell would enter alone, and his surprise at meeting her in this house be unwhitened by any.

A false or careless step now might ruin her for ever.

She looked very pale, but not less lovely. Her dress was of a thin, dull, black material, and she wore no ornaments, no flowers. In her strange eyes there was a great despair, and almost overwhelming dread. She moved wearily to a window, and sat down, shielding her face with her hands.

Then Mrs. Rossvell entered with Theodore, and Leonie shivered, wondering what would be the end; then came Aylmer, followed by Irene followed by a tall, fair, handsome man, with eyes like purple hyacinths. She sat still, hardly daring to breathe; wishing passionately that the ordeal was over, and she knew her fate.

"Oh! Mr. Darrell," said Irene's soft voice, "I must introduce you to Miss Templeton," and she drew him towards Leonie. As she uttered the name he gave a little involuntary start, and Irene said, "Of course Mr. Maxwell has spoken to you of her—she will seem no stranger."

"Of course," he answered, with the ready assurance of a man of the world, "and I shall be very glad to meet the lady;" but his eyes gave the lie to his words, only Irene was not looking into them.

As they drew near her, Leonie rose; her wonderful face was as white as the lilies Irene wore, and one hand hung clenched at her side, but, as they looked steadily each into the other's face, she bowed and forced herself to smile. He made some commonplace, courteous remark, and then they took their seat.

"What a deucedly plucky girl she is," thought Fergus Darrell, with grudging admiration, "but she must be removed from here. Jealousy plays curious pranks with women, and I don't intend she should spoil my running with little Irene. What a pretty child she is!—and it's high time I married, and settled down on my estate."

Then he turned to Irene and began to talk well and brilliantly, although the young lady gave him scanty encouragement, having conceived a violent dislike to him. He was hand-

some, witty, wealthy, but she detected a false ring to his voice, something fustian in his smile; and he had nothing good to say of any creature he chose to discuss. Once lifting her eyes to his, she said,—

"You are very uncharitable, I fear, Mr. Darrell. I should not like you to criticise me."

"To you I should be a most lenient critic, even had you many faults," and he said it in a tone that implied she had none.

Anxious to turn the conversation into another channel, she asked,—

"And may I ask your opinion of Miss Templeton? Don't you consider her beauty perfect?"

He gave her a little startled glance, but finding she had spoken in all innocence he answered, with a drawl,—

"Amber eyes, yellow hair, and a brunette complexion are scarcely good in conjunction. No, I must distinctly do not like her;" and yet only three years ago he thought her the loveliest of all the maidens of Madrid, had had no rest until he learned her name, and where she lived—until he had made the poor, helpless, innocent child his abject slave!

Did no thought of the past, in which he had played so cruel and vile a part, come to torment him as he sat looking on the face he had made sad—the woman whose life he had wholly blighted?

No, no—he lived only for self; and when he had grown weary of Leonie he longed for freedom and hated her. Now it seemed to him she stood between him and possible happiness, and he hated her the more. Oh! the shame of it!—the shame of it! That he should have no ruth on the broken heart, and the spoiled life!

Irene spoke again.

"I am sorry you do not admire her, as Mr. Maxwell hopes one day to make her his wife!"

"What! He would never be such a fool? I mean—I beg your pardon and here; but with Theodore's advantages he might do so much better. What does he know of her former life?"

"None of us know very much more than that she is an orphan and friendless. Aylmer was the means of introducing her to us."

"Then she is a protegee of his! How extremely interesting!" Fergus Darrell said, with a half-concealed sneer. "Has he, too, fallen a victim to her many charms?"

Irene flushed slightly; she did not like his tone.

"There would be small wonder if he did, seeing she is as accomplished as she is beautiful, and has a sweet disposition, too, though melancholy."

"You praise generously, Miss Rossvell," he said, looking into the soft brown eyes. "Do you know I am wondering how Theodore could be so blind as not to see your loveliness, and covet it for himself!"

"Mr. Darrell, your compliments are very fulsome," she remarked, coldly. "They border on ill-taste," and she turned a very flushed face upon him.

She certainly was very pretty then in an almost infantile way, and the admiration Darrell felt for her increased. He had always been courted and made much of by the women; and that this little girl should evince a dislike to him was a new experience and he was determined to overcome it. With such men as he opposition only inflamed, and not unfrequently endows the object of their so-called love with many fabulous virtues and graces. You see, it is only possession which robs a thing of its worth.

But there was Leonie to be thought of, and she might prove a formidable enemy, might frustrate all his plans. Yes, at any risk she must be removed. He fancied he knew her character thoroughly, and remembering all her love, all her devotion, told himself that even if he did disclose her secret to the Rossvells she would hold her peace concerning his share in that old story of wrong and deceit. He must see her and make conditions with her. She should leave her present home, and hold no intercourse with those

who had so long befriended her. The alternative would be exposure.

So when, looking round later in the evening, he did not see her in the room, he rose and went to the little conservatory, hoping to find her there. Instinct guided him aright: Leonie was sitting in a drooping attitude, her chin sunk upon her bosom.

Hearing his step she looked up, then rose and stood white and rigid, waiting for him to join her. In the glance he gave her she read only hate and aversion, and a shudder passed over her. Involuntarily she clenched her hands and set her teeth, for she knew the man's nature too well to credit him with mercy.

"I want to speak to you. Can we be alone here?" he asked, feily. She merely bowed, not daring to trust her voice.

"I was disagreeably surprised to meet you again, and here of all places," he began, and she interrupted in a swift, low tone,—

"The meeting is not of my seeking. I should wish the whole world to be between us. What can you have to say to me after three long years of alliance and neglect?"

"I've no time to waste in reproaches and no inclination. Is it true what the Rossvells say, that Theodore wishes to marry you?"

"It is true," with a flush of triumph in the midst of her humiliation.

"That shall never be. You shall not rally his name or sit in the place where now his mother reigns. You have forfeited all right to his love, all right to such a position as he could lift you to."

She winced under his words, but answered steadily,—

"You do well, Fergus Darrell, to remind me of these things, but it is like you, as I learned too late. But do you remember so little of me that you can believe I would unite my lot with him—hide my disgrace under cover of his name? I love him, as once I dreamed I loved you. I love him a thousandfold more passionately than he does me, but I will not marry him."

He laughed scornfully.

"That you certainly will not. I would not allow it. Of course if he chose to do so, after hearing your story, he would do it at his own risk; but I know him well enough to be sure that he would never marry a woman who has been what you were."

Even her lips were white, but she said, steadily,—

"What is it you want of me?"

"I insist that you leave the Rossvells with all possible speed, and without telling them anything of the past. I don't suppose you are proud of it. I intend making Irene Rossvell my wife, consequently you must feel your companionship is the last I should desire for her."

"I am earning an honest livelihood. If I leave here I must starve or eat the bread of charity; I will do neither. The time has long gone by when I was your slave, obeying your every whim, and believing you could do no wrong. So I elect to stay, but I will say nothing of what has past, as much for my sake as yours."

"You defy me!" he cried, in suppressed tones. "You will do well to reconsider your decision; remember, I can ruin you utterly."

"In doing so you will injure your own cause. Oh! show me some mercy, some pity, for the sake of the love you once professed for me—for the sake of my little child!"

She drooped low then, and put up her hands to hide the shame upon her face.

"The child lives then?" he questioned, harshly.

"Yes, and, thank Heaven, grows each day less like you."

"You are complimentary, madam. Pray, may I ask what you have done with the delectable infant?"

"What other women in my position are compelled to do?"

He stood silent a moment, then said,—

"Look here, Leonie, you know very well what manner of man I am; that I will have my desires gratified at any cost, that I never forgive the man or woman who thwarts them. You

know, too, I can do you incalculable harm, which must reach the child too. You had best go away. I will recompense you for the loss of your situation. I fancy a hundred pounds would do that handsomely. Do you accept?"

"No, I do not," she said, in a sudden flash of terrible anger. "Go your way, and I will go mine; I will not molest you by word or deed. I ask nothing of you, and I will concede nothing; and be careful how you act towards me in the future, because I am a desperate woman, and might take such terrible revenge upon you as you cannot dream."

She had drawn near to him, her eyes blazing, her nostrils dilated, her lips quivering.

"Tigress!" he said, with bitter scorn; "what possible harm could you do me? Your revenge would only recoil upon yourself. A word from me will lose you your lover, and the esteem of the immaculate Aylmer; will make you an outcast and a creature for all honest women to loathe and shun. Go your way; run on to the end of your tether, and then acknowledge, when ruin comes, that it would have been well to accede to my demands."

He turned and left her, and she watched him go with burning hate in her heart, and a passionate determination to hold her own against him to the bitter end.

There was little Lenny to be considered, and Bailey's income was so small that, without the addition of Leonie's salary, the child at times might suffer privations. So for two reasons she elected to stay on, although she went in fear and trembling lest each day should be her last in this quiet home, where she had found so much kindness.

It added not a little to her burden that Theodore was now a constant visitor, that he spoke and looked his love so openly that it was palpable to all. At such moments it seemed to her she must cry out or go mad; and all the while she knew those cruel purple eyes were bent upon her in strong disfavour and contempt.

Fergus Darrell made no progress in his wooing, and he attributed his non-success to Leonie's influence with Irene. He really loved the latter, as much as was possible to a man of his inordinately selfish character, and he determined to have his revenge upon Leonie, to draw her away, so that she should not poison Irene's mind against him.

False and suspicious himself, he would not even credit Irene's statement (in reply to his questionings) that Leonie had never spoken of him; and he began to insinuate that Miss Templeton was not all she seemed. He treated her with scant courtesy, and hinted she was an unfit companion for "one so pure and good as Miss Roswell."

To do Irene justice, she strove to disbelieve all these things, and to continue on friendly terms with Leonie; but the leaven of Darrell's malice was working all too well, both upon Irene and her aunt, and Leonie was not slow to notice the growing coldness of their manner, and, noticing it, to agitate herself with doubts and fears.

Sometimes Fergus waylaid her, always with the same request, and always receiving the same answer. He had not expected this resolution in her, because in the old days she had been so subservient; but then he had loved her, or had professed to do so, which is much the same thing with a large majority of men; and she—well, she had simply worshipped him, being young and innocent—and, oh! so easily deceived by his soporifics. Now she hated him, and in that lay the whole gist of the matter.

One day, finding her alone, he said, roughly,—"How much longer is this state of affairs to go on? My patience is nearly exhausted."

She smiled bitterly.

"It is for you to say how long you will persecute me, make my days terrible, and my nights sleepless, because of shame and fear. If you mean how long shall I remain here, I answer, until you drive me away. For your own sake you will not do that."

He laughed coarsely.

(Continued on page 304.)

## LOVE AND LOSS.

—101—

### CHAPTER XXXVII.

LUCILLE, close against the door outside, caught low, passionate murmurs from within in her mistress's voice, and guessed that she was pouring out her heart's wild grief in the inanimate ears of the unconscious man. It was pitiful, and tears overflowed her eyes.

For some time the low murmuring continued, then all grew as still as death.

She waited awhile, then fearful that the lady had fainted again, opened the door and went softly in.

Godfrey Rae lay still and silent, just faintly breathing, as before, and Mrs. Gascoigne's dark head was bent down, resting upon the patient's hand.

She motioned Lucille to her side, saying, gently:

"You may share my vigil, Lucille, and because I know this seems strange to you, I will confide in you. We loved each other very dearly once, this man and I, but a wicked woman came between us and wrecked my happiness. I tried to hate him, but now that he is dying, the old love rises in me again, and my heart is breaking."

That was all; but she knew she was sure of the other woman's sympathy.

Lucille might marvel at the utter breaking down of the proudest woman she had ever known, but she would love her better for her constancy and her womanly tenderness.

So they kept their lonely vigils by the sufferer, who for twenty-four hours gave no sign of knowing aught, until they began to fear that he would pass into the other world without a sign or token to those left on earth.

Mrs. Croft had been told that an old friend of her brother would help to nurse him; but when she saw that it was Mrs. Gascoigne, she was filled with secret wonder that found expression in the words:

"He never told me that he knew you, madam; but I do not see how he could have forgotten one like you."

Mrs. Gascoigne smiled with transient bitterness, but made no reply to the frank compliment, only showing her appreciation of it by simple, unaffected kindness to the grieving sister.

The night and the day wore away, and in the early dusk of the December eve Godfrey Rae suddenly opened his eyes with full consciousness in them, and met the eager glance of large, dark sorrowful orbs.

"Oh, Godfrey, it is I—Marion! Do you know me?" she murmured, prayerfully.

In a broken whisper, he answered:

"I know you."

Then his eyes closed again, and with a stifled sob, Mrs. Gascoigne sent Lucille to tell the doctor.

He hastened to his side, delighted to find that his patient had rallied; but he whispered to the anxious watcher:

"I do not dare bid you hope anything from this. The case is most uncertain."

She bowed her head in silence; but from that moment not a movement of the invalid passed unwatched.

He had recovered his consciousness, but the doctor saw in him as yet no certain chance of recovery. He was very still and quiet, speaking only when addressed, and lying always with half-closed eyes that seemed to notice nothing. At times they opened wider and followed Mrs. Gascoigne's movements about the room, but he did not permit her to surprise that scrutiny.

She was tender, but very timid, scarcely daring to offer the least attention, lest it be repulsed. There rang in her memory always some words he had uttered long ago:

"Marion, you have put upon me an unmerited disgrace and a cruel wrong. I will never forgive you as long as I live!"

Again, in the garden at Idelwild, three years ago, he had said to her most bitterly:

"Do not think I have come to forgive you!"

She had never forgotten the bitterness of those words. They dashed her, too, for in her own opinion she had been the only wronged one, he the transgressor.

He was going out of life now, and she read in his silence that he would keep his word, that for the grievance he cherished he would not grant forgiveness.

Neither would he plead with her for pardon for the wrong that he had done.

It was a cruel position for both, and she felt that he only endured her presence for cold pity's sake, while secretly wishing her away.

"God help me, I cannot bear to leave him!" she thought, despairingly.

The next morning the travellers arrived.

Lillah and her aunt had a most affecting meeting, though it was the elder woman who broke down and forced the other to tears.

"Oh, Lillah, you never loved him as I did! You never knew him at his best—before sorrow came to him and spoiled his nature," she sobbed.

Lillah could only weep:

"It is not my fault that I was lacking in sympathy. I was never told of his troubles."

"He did not wish for you to know, dear, lest your young life should be saddened more than it was already."

"Dear aunt, I am very sorry for him, and grieved to see you looking so pale and thin. Tell me how all this came about," pleaded Lillah. And while they are exchanging confidences, we will return to Brian and his mother.

She had gone to her room to receive him alone, and he clasped her tenderly in his arms.

"Poor mother!" he sighed, with deep compassion, and then they sat down and talked awhile together.

"I have one pleasant piece of news for you. Lillah and Darcy are engaged," he said.

"I am glad of it—under the circumstances," she replied, exactly as he had replied to Darcy's announcement of the betrothal.

She mused silently a moment, then added:

"It will be good news for her father. He can die easier."

"You are sure that he must die, dear mother?"

"You will not doubt it when you see him, Brian; and the physician does not hold out any hope, though he thinks that the end may be lingering."

She spoke with the steady calmness of despair, and her son looked at her with uneasy eyes, wondering how she felt, how she was bearing it.

Perhaps she read his thoughts, for she said quickly:

"Go to him as soon as you can, dear. Perhaps it may give him some pleasure to see you by him now. Be kind and tender—for the sake of old days."

"And you, mother?"

"I have done what I could—for duty's sake."

"Only for that?" he wondered, but dared not ask, and soon left her to seek Mr. Rae.

Between the two there was a touching greeting—a strange one for two men who could only be supposed to harbour resentment against each other.

Brian was not ashamed to shed tears when he saw that helpless form and pallid face with the bandaged head. His voice trembled while he talked, and Mr. Rae's replies were low and gentle.

"I have kept very quiet. I have saved my strength till you and Lillah came. I felt I would have much to hear then," he said, feebly.

Brian answered hopefully:

"I have good news for you. Lillah has promised to marry my cousin Darcy Cathcart. Perhaps she might bear to know our secret now."

"Perhaps so," he replied, with a heavy sigh; and just then the door opened softly again, admitting Mrs. Croft with her daughter and Madame Soltaire.

Brian drew aside and returned to his mother, who was still alone, having sent Lucille to help with the wounded woman just across the hall—Emma Goring.

Mrs. Gascoigne clung to her son, whispering wildly:



"Tell me what brought her here, that beautiful Madame Soltaire? Is she aught to him?"

"His daughter's friend—nothing more, dear mother."

"Are you sure—quite sure? For Darcy hinted once that Lillah wished them to marry. And she is so charming—perhaps he loves her, Brian!" jealously.

"No, mother, they are nothing but friends. Her heart is in the grave. Come, let me tell you her sad, touching story."

He drew her to a seat, and went over the sad details Madame Soltaire had given him, drawing bright tears from his mother's eyes.

Then someone knocked at the door. It was Doctor Deane.

"I have been with my patient, Mr. Rae," he said, "and the coming of his daughter has greatly excited him, causing an improvement for the time, though how long it may last I cannot say. It seems as if there is something on his mind that he wishes to communicate before he dies, and he begs you and your son to join him at once with the others."

#### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GODFREY RAE's haggard eyes marked the entrance of the doctor and the Gascoigne, and he said, feebly,—

"Are you all here, Lillah, Brian, his mother, my sister, and my kind friend, Madame Soltaire?"

"They are all here," Doctor Deane replied; and Mr. Rae continued,—

"I should like Mr. Cathcart to be present, too—and Mrs. Gascoigne's maid. She may need her ministrations in a dying scene. You, too, doctor, I would like to have stay if you can bear the disclosure of family secrets."

The old doctor answered, genially,—

"I have no wish to pry into family secrets, but it is best that I should stay, that I may render assistance should you overtax your feeble powers."

They brought Darcy Cathcart and Lucille, and there were eight of them forming a curious, anxious group about the bed.

Across the hall, gasping for breath, and tossing restlessly from side to side in the pain of internal injuries, was a woman who would have taken as great an interest as any in the novel scene transpiring so close to her; but no one gave her a single thought, no one supposed that the humble servant, Emma Goring, could have taken any interest in the event, much less have thrown a light on the dark mystery that had saddened several hopeful lives. Everything had been so closely guarded that little of it had come to her knowledge. Lucille had told her that Mr. Rae's daughter and her friends had come, that was all. The suffering woman had a lively curiosity to see Lillah, whom she had nursed as a child, and of whom her aunt had talked so much, but she knew that her curiosity must bide the proper time.

A housemaid had come in just now, and said,—

"Lucille, you are wanted in Mr. Rae's room. I will stay here till you come back."

Lucille went as bidden, and stationed herself at the back of the arm-chair where her mistress was sitting, close to the bed.

Then Godfrey Rae exclaimed, clearly,—

"Marion!"

Mrs. Gascoigne gave a convulsive start, and looked fearfully at the speaker.

His blue eyes met hers full with a commanding expression, as he continued,—

"Marion, in meeting my daughter here on my dying bed she has demanded to know the details of the feud, as she believes it, that shadowed so darkly the last three years of her young life. Once I would have died to shield her from such sorrow, but now she declares that certainty of sorrow is better than the pangs of suspense. She demands the truth. 'It is our bitter duty to yield to her desires.'"

A hushed murmur of surprise went around the group, and Lillah buried her face on Madame Soltaire's bosom.

She had, indeed, pleaded with her father for the truth, and he had promised to gratify her wish, though she wondered why he added,—

"There was, indeed, a terrible reason why you could not marry Brian, my dear child, and it would have killed you at first to know it; but now that you love another man, and are engaged to marry him, you will not mind so much."

They had startled her strangely, those words, and she hung trembling on every sentence that fell now from her father's lips, and before she hid her pallid face she had seen Brian draw his chair close to his mother's side—the mother he loved so dearly still, though she had parted him so cruelly from his beautiful betrothed.

Again Godfrey Rae breathed through pallid, pain-drawn lips,—

"All I ask of you, Marion, is that you shall tell your side of our marriage and divorce. I will follow with my version of the story."

The listeners could scarcely express outcries of surprise.

Godfrey Rae had revealed to them, all in one brief sentence, a totally unsuspected fact.

Mrs. Gascoigne, the wealthy, beautiful, haughty woman, was his divorced wife.

Lillah trembled with surprise, and clung closer to her loving friend, who thought quickly,—

"My suspicions and forebodings are about to be verified. Alas, poor Lillah!"

Brian drew his arm about his mother, whispering to her of courage in this trying hour, begging her to gratify the sick man's request.

Godfrey Rae waited a moment, then added,—

"You may make the story as short as you please, only let it come from your own lips."

Mrs. Gascoigne lifted her head with something of her old haughty pride, and looked at Lillah where she drooped against her friend's breast, but her voice was slightly tremulous as she began,—

"When I first met your father, Lillah, he was a rising young lawyer employed by my father to attend to some complicated business matters. Our acquaintance ripened into love, and he became a suitor for my hand against my father's wishes. But as my lover's only fault was poverty and we were rich, I soon persuaded papa to withdraw his objections. So we were married."

She paused and sighed, and everyone heard Mr. Rae re-echo that sigh heavily.

"Go on, dear," whispered Brian, encouragingly, with an anxious look at Lillah.

"We were very happy, for my husband seemed a model of manly perfection," continued Mrs. Gascoigne. "We lived at my old home, my father made Godfrey the manager of all his investments, thus insuring him independence of my fortune, for he was very proud and impatient of being thought a fortune-hunter. Brian was born when I had been married one year, and until he was four years old I was the happiest woman on earth."

Godfrey Rae gave her a sudden bright look that she did not perceive, as if grateful for those words.

Again sighing, she continued,—

"Then a dark shadow fell over our home—the shadow of a beautiful young girl, the daughter of a former client of my husband. She arrived suddenly at our home one day, bearing a letter from her father who had recently died. In it he commended the girl—Norah Barton—to the guardianship of my husband, begging that he would keep her at his home till she married. To be brief, her father's property dwindled to nothing when it came to be settled up, leaving her penniless on our hands—a charge I would most generously have undertaken but for the predilection Miss Barton immediately manifested for my husband, driving me wild with her kittenish coquetties, for she was very charming, with abundant tawny locks and effective hazel eyes, that were always fixed on Godfrey with a passion she could not disguise. The Gascoignes are charged with being jealous people, and I do not deny it; I feared she would win my husband with her blandishments, and I imperiously demanded of him that he send Miss Barton away."

#### CHAPTER XXXIX.

EVERYONE in the room was listening with suppressed excitement to Mrs. Gascoigne's story, every eye was fixed on her mortally pale face, so death-like in its pallor save for the great Oriental dark eyes burning like coals of fire.

Lillah had grown ghastly, too, as she rested in the clasp of Madame Soltaire's arm, taking no heed of her handsome betrothed on the other side, hovering near to console her in the terrible revelation soon coming.

The lady paused, drew her breath in sharply, like one in pain, and resumed,—

"I could not bring my husband to believe in the sincerity of my objections to his ward. He first laughed at my jealousy, then upbraided me with my injustice to a homeless orphan girl. He could not send her away penniless into the world, for he had been under obligations to her father, in whose office he had gained his first law practice. He begged me to have patience and charity towards Miss Barton until her superior attractions should win her a husband. Heaven knows I was never lacking in Christian charity towards any unfortunate person; but Norah Barton was not a good girl. A flirt to her finger-tips, and totally without principle or conscience, she discovered my jealousy and played on it cleverly, augmenting it by cunning schemes that my husband never suspected, and that I, in my blither pride and jealousy, never betrayed to him. So matters went on for a year, and in that interval of time I several times surprised my husband in compromising situations with his ward. By my father's advice, I ordered her to leave my house, and there was a stormy scene."

"Miss Barton threw shame to the winds. She refused to go, and taunted me with having won my husband from me. I threatened to sue him for divorce, naming her as co-respondent. She retorted that it was what they both wished, in order that he might obtain his freedom to marry her. Without a word to my husband—for we had long been estranged through our differences over her—I left my home, taking my little son, and accompanied by my father, who fully sympathized with my grievances and despised the authors of my unhappiness. I then carried out my threat of suing my husband for divorce, implicating Miss Barton. To cut the story short, my husband fought against the divorce; but his shameless ward helped it on by every art in her power, never denying the charges against her; and it was soon granted, giving me the custody of our son and the liberty to resume my maiden name. Mr. Rae removed to another place, where Miss Barton followed him, and within a few months he married her, thus proving his fidelity to me."

Her story was ended, and she leaned her head back against Brian's shoulder, closing her eyes to shut out the sight of the surprised and pitying faces to whom she had just confessed the story of her life's humiliation.

"Bravely done, dear mother!" whispered Brian, with a gentle kiss on her cold cheek.

"It is my turn now," said Godfrey Rae, with a heavy sigh, and Doctor Deane rejoined,—

"I cannot permit you to talk very long, my dear sir."

"It will not be necessary, sir, for Mrs. Gascoigne has saved me the trouble of a long explanation. What she has related is perfectly true on the face of it, but behind the tragedy of our divorce lie the actual facts of the terrible mistakes of a jealous woman and a heedless man too secure of his great happiness to guard it close enough."

A great thrill ran through the listeners, as he continued,—

"I hold myself to blame that I was impatient of my wife's jealousy, and laughed at her fears that Miss Barton was trying to win my heart. I pitied my ward for her orphanage and poverty, and I was too generous to believe that she was aught but a joyous-hearted girl whose little kittenish coquetties amounted to nothing. I was simply blind, besides being inordinately proud and passionately resentful of my wife's unjust suspicions. I loved her to idolatry, and her lack of faith angered me. I carried everything with

too high a hand, perhaps, but I did not dream to what lengths the affair was going."

Doctor Deane interposed gently,—

"You are exhausting your strength by too long a discourse."

"Doctor, what difference can it make to a dying man whether his little stock of strength is exhausted sooner or later?" wearily.

"Go on, then; but be brief."

"I found out too late," continued Godfrey Rae, "that Miss Barton was different from what I thought. She had indeed conceived a mad love for me that had driven her to desperate lengths to win me. It is true that she followed me, true that I married her, but only because of her passionate pleadings and assertions that through my wife's jealousy her character had been ruined. I gave her the shelter of my name, but Heaven forgive me, I hated her as long as she lived, and could not help rejoicing when she was dead. I obtained a position as a commercial traveller, so that I could spend most of my time away from her side, so her victory was a poor one after all, for she had wrecked two lives without gaining any happiness for herself. As for the rest, I affirm now on my death-bed and on my hopes of heaven, that *Norah Barton* and I were as innocent of wrong-doing before my divorce as the purest angels. She was wicked enough to make my wife believe it, through her jealousy so easily imposed on, but she was not guilty, so help me Heaven!"

He paused, and there rose a stifled cry of bitter anguish. It came from Lillah's ghastly lips as the cruel truth began to dawn on her bewildered brain.

Godfrey Rae looked at her pityingly, and said,—

"Ah, Lillah, you understand it all now. She was your mother. Perhaps you will not blame me now that I failed in love to you, that I forgot my duty to you in resentment at what you represented—the wicked love of a woman who wrecked my life in parting me from all that made it dear."

A low moan came from her blanched lips, and Brian Gascoigne left his mother's side and approached her with leaden-weighted feet and a look as of death's agony in his fixed blue eyes. He took her hand, and said, hollowly,—

"Lillah, you understand it all now, but you will not mind it, I know, because Darcy is going to make you very happy, my dear little sister."

No one in that room ever forgot the white agony of Lillah Rae's face as she sprang to her feet, with outstretched arms, quivering all over as it a bullet had pierced her heart, pushing Brian away as if his hand had given the mortal wound.

"Oh, Heaven, let me die!" she shrieked, in her despair, and sank senseless in Madame's arms.

## CHAPTER XL.

DOCTOR DEANE feared that all that excitement must hurt his patient very much, so he cleared the room as soon as possible, letting no one stay but Mrs. Croft and himself.

She, poor old lady, was terribly shocked at hearing the full story of her brother's life, having only known a few hazy details before.

But she pulled herself together the best she could, and hung tenderly over the bedside, clasping her brother's cold hands, and murmuring,—

"Poor Godfrey! how cruelly you have been wronged, and how sad your life has been! If I had known all the truth, I could never have blamed you for neglecting Lillah, though it is a pity, for a sweeter girl never lived, I am sure. She cannot have inherited her disposition from her wicked mother."

He looked at her kindly, but he was too exhausted by all he had endured to answer, but lay, pale and gasping, among the pillows, while the doctor busied himself with restoratives.

"All this excitement has been very bad for him, and he must have quiet and sleep the rest of the day," he said, uneasily, before he went out to see after his other patients.

They had carried Lillah to her own room, where Madame Soltaire hung over her with tearful devotion, excluding every one else, even her anxious betrothed, who hung about in most disconsolate fashion.

Lucille returned to her watch by Emma Goring, and Brian accompanied his mother to her own apartment, mastering his own agitation in his tenderness for her trouble.

"You will lie down and rest, dear mother, or you will be ill after this fatiguing ordeal," he pleaded.

She was pacing restlessly up and down the floor, a picture of nervous suffering painful to gaze upon. Pausing in the centre of the room, her white, jewelled fingers locked together as if in pain, she looked at him with burning eyes, crying wildly,—

"Oh, Brian, how can I rest, how can I sleep! He is dying, and I—I am full of doubt and terror! Awakened conscience daunts me. Have I wronged him or not? Is he innocent, or is he guilty?"

"Mother, you heard him swear to his innocence by all his hopes of heaven!"

"He swore to it before, Brian, on the day when I sued him for divorce. He came to me swearing his innocence, pleading for mercy. I turned from him in anger, refusing to believe him, securing all his prayers."

"How could you be so hard, mother!"

"I was mad with wounded love and jealousy. I had let that fendish girl destroy, with cunning arts, all my faith in him. Besides, my father was against him. He feared he had married me for my wealth alone."

"Poor mother, how you were tortured! No wonder you made such a fatal mistake."

"Brian, Brian," her voice rang out wildly, "you believe that it was a mistake!"

He came up to her, put his hands on her shoulders, and looked at her earnestly, tenderly.

"Mother, must I tell you frankly what I believe, what I have believed in my soul ever since my first interview with my father, that day in London?"

"Yes; speak the whole truth, though it crushes me?" sighed the unhappy woman; and he answered,—

"I do not mean to be cruel to you, dear mother. I pity you, and I understand your terrible provocation for all you did; but I believe in my father's innocence and his perfect nobility. He told me his full story then, and I have believed in him, loved him, revered him ever since, and his death will be a blow to me only second to your own."

"Then, Brian, I am a miserable sinner. I have wrecked his life!" contritely.

"Then you must acknowledge your fault, and beg his forgiveness."

"He has sworn that he will never forgive me as long as I live. Oh, my heart, what a cruel wretch I have been to him! And I loved him so! I do not merit his forgiveness."

"But he shall grant it, mother. I will add my prayers to yours."

"Oh, Brian, shall we go to him now, my poor wronged love?" weeping.

"Not now, dear mother, because he is exhausted and needs rest. We must wait."

"Oh, if he could know my shame and repentance! And how I have loved him always in spite of myself! Might it not comfort him, Brian?"

"I will find out when he can see you, and tell you himself, mother, if you will be very patient and let him rest awhile first, mother."

"I will wait as long as you wish me, Brian, my poor boy, for I need your forgiveness too. I have wronged you also, depriving you these long and weary years of a father's love. Besides, there was all your bitter trouble over Lillah. But thank Heaven, it is all over now, that sorrow."

"Yes, it is all over now," he said, calmly, but with white lips.

And then he went away to his father's room, where Mrs. Croft was sitting alone, wishing he were not so restless, fearing it was a bad sign.

Brian bent over him caressingly, and whispered,—

"My poor mother after years of sorrow, divided between doubt and anger, is at last convinced of your innocence, and her poor heart is breaking with remorse for her sin and love that she could never conquer."

He saw a strange gleam in the deep blue eyes, and the pale lips twitched with emotion.

He continued, almost pleadingly,—

"Her pride is humbled in the dust, and her dearest wish is to express her penitence, and pray for forgiveness. Her sin was great, but dear father, you have a noble heart. Is it shut against her for ever?"

What a light came over the pallid face, what strange new fire to the dim eyes, what deep emotion quivered in the voice that answered,—

"When your mother first entered into my heart, she looked the door and threw away the key for ever. How could I bar her out after life-long possession?"

"Oh, father, what a constant heart! Yet she fears that you can never forgive her."

"In the passion of wounded love and anger, I swore that I would not, Brian, but that was long ago, and in the face of death, how possible these worldly resentments seem! Then, I too, believed she had weari of me, believed me a fortune-hunter. Her wealth and her pride riled a wall between us. I could not dream that lips like her's could ever stoop to that word 'forgive.'"

"Would you like to hear her say it now, my father?"

"No, Brian, for it is needless. If she could come to me with another word—the dear word love—it would pay for all. How sweet to die with her hand in mine, her lips on my brow!"

Ah, what a love was here!—so patient under cruel wrong, so faithful, so forgiving! Brian's nature bowed in reverence to its holiness.

"She will come—when you wish," he said, gently.

"Let it be now, Brian."

"But Doctor Deane said—" began his sister, uneasily.

"I cannot permit anyone to dictate in this. Every moment of suspense counts against my life," the patient answered, firmly, and Brian went.

It was but a little while before he returned with a drooping figure on his arm.

Mrs. Croft safely withdrew to a window, with her back to the bed.

Brian led his mother to the bedside, and placed her in a chair. Then he took her cold and trembling hand, and placed it in that of his father.

She thrilled with a passion of joy at the feeble pressure, and bent forward, pressing her quivering lips to his pale brow, whispering in a tempest of restrained emotion,—

"Oh, Godfrey, I wronged you—but I never ceased to love you!"

And there was deep silence and rare happiness—even though the shadow of death hovered over the room. And presently she whispered, entreatingly,—

"Oh, Godfrey, do not die and leave me now. I cannot let you go again! I will nurse and tend you so faithfully that surely Heaven will give you back to me! And some day, when I have somewhat atoned by penitence and devotion, perhaps you will let me be your wife again."

"Ah, Marion, if it might be now, for the doctor does not hold out any hope of life! But at least I should die happy, knowing you were mine again."

"You shall have your wish!" cried Brian, hastening from the room.

Then Godfrey called his sister to make friends with Marion.

"I should like for you to love each other when I am gone," he said, gently.

"Oh, brother, we cannot let you go now, when happiness has come to you again! I am praying for you every moment!" cried the kind old lady, clasping hands with the beautiful woman whom she would be proud to call sister.



## CHAPTER XLII.

MEANTIME, Lucille, watching by the bedside of Emma Goring, did not like the looks of her patient.

The woman had been very bad from the first, her body covered with bruises, and complaining of severe inward pains that indicated internal injuries.

All that medical skill could do, combined with careful nursing, had been lavished on the sufferer; but it was quite evident that her days were numbered.

To-day she was restless and querulous, sliding down in bed, and picking at the covers in an ominous way.

"Where is my mistress?" she inquired, presently; adding in a fretful tone, "she has entirely neglected me to-day."

Lucille soothingly made excuses for Mrs. Croft, saying that her niece had arrived that morning, and they had been together in the room of Mr. Rae, who was not expected to live long.

"I should like to see Miss Rae," Emma muttered, curiously.

"That would be impossible, for the young lady was quite prostrated by the excitement in her father's room, and was carried to bed just now, with the doctor in attendance," replied Lucille.

Emma kept silence quite a little while, then she sharply ordered Lucille to go away and send Mrs. Croft.

The maid obeyed, only too glad to get away from the gruesome company of the dying woman.

Mrs. Croft came at once, and was weary from excitement, but full of kindly sympathy.

"Emma I am sorry to see that you are not so well to-day," she said.

"So you can see it! Well, I feel it myself; that's why I wanted you. I knew you would tell me the truth. Am I going to die?" querulously.

Mrs. Croft had been by many a death-bed, and she saw all the signs here, so she answered, frankly:

"Emma, I don't want to frighten you, but it's time you should make your peace with God."

The poor wretch shuddered, and moaned:

"Are you sure? Did the doctor say so, mamma?"

"He has never had any hope of your recovery, Emma, and you are failing fast to-day. You will soon be done with this world; but, alas! you are not ready for the next one."

She did not want to frighten the parting soul, but she was sorrowful over the life going out into eternal darkness.

Emma Goring shuddered, and cried:

"I always meant to get ready when the time came, but it caught me unprepared. I'm only fifty odd years old, and I hoped to live to ninety. Oh, tell me what to do! I help me, pray for me!"

"I've prayed for you, Emma, ever since you made your home under my roof, and I'm glad your heart is softened at last. Try to love God and believe in His goodness. Say after me: 'Lord, forgive a dying sinner, and save me, for Christ's sake! Amen.'"

The dying creature clutched at the bed-clothes, and mumbled the words in piteous earnest, after which Mrs. Croft knelt by the bed, and herself offered up a fervent prayer.

"Oh, I've been bad and wicked all my life, hating God because I was poor! I don't know how to get His favour now," sighed the dying sinner, and Mrs. Croft answered, soothingly:

"If you have done anything wicked that you can undo, now is the time to repent and get God's forgiveness."

She saw a look of alarm come into the fading eyes, and Emma plucked wildly at the counterpane, muttering:

"I did a cruel wrong twenty years ago. I stole the baby daughter of a broken-hearted young widow."

"Good heavens! how dreadful! Tell me all about it quickly, and perhaps something may yet be done to right the wrong," cried Mrs. Croft, in dismay.

But at that moment they were interrupted by

the opening of the door, and Madame Soltaire glided in, murmuring in her sweet, soft voice:

"They told me you were watching by a very sick woman, and as Lillah is asleep, I thought I might be of some assistance to you."

She had never heard the name of Emma Goring, and she came and stood by the bed, looking down, with pity and sympathy, at the poor soul.

Emma turned her heavy eyes upward to the lovely face, and then uttered a cry of deadly fear:

"My God! it is Mrs. Soltaire, come to haunt me in my dying hour!"

"Emma Goring, where is my child, my baby daughter?" cried the other, wildly; and, shaking with excitement, she added: "Do not die, miserable wretch, till you reveal the truth!"

Mrs. Croft stared in wonder, and exclaimed:

"The poor woman was just confessing to me that she had stolen a young widow's child twenty years ago. Go on with your story, Emma."

She pushed the agitated lady into a chair as she spoke, and waited with eager curiosity and sympathy for the next words.

Emma looked fearfully at the woman she had wronged, and muttered:

"Do not look so wretched, lady, for all is well with your daughter, and she shall be restored to your arms."

"Thank Heaven—thank Heaven!" cried the mother, with a rush of glad tears.

"So it was Madame Soltaire's child that you stole, Emma! But why did you do such a wicked thing?" cried her mistress.

"Oh, Mrs. Croft, it was for the greed of gold, that has always cursed my life—the longing for gold and pleasure! A beautiful woman came to me, and said: 'I have been married two years, and I have no child. My husband will never love me till I give him an heir. I would like a little girl because his first wife had a boy, and I hate it. Find me a pretty baby, and help me to impose it on him as my own when he returns from his long journey, and you shall live with me, and I will make you rich.' Wretch that I was, I stole Mrs. Soltaire's sweet baby, and helped the other woman to fool her husband. She paid me well; but growing weary of my extortions after two years, she and her husband stole away, where I could never trace them, till one night I saw him in the train and followed him, only to find that his wife had died years before."

"But my child, my darling, where is she?" sobbed the eager mother.

"Where is the child?" echoed Mrs. Croft, suspiciously, and Emma Goring answered, gladly:

"Oh, how glad I am to restore her safe to her mother's arms. She is here with you, Mrs. Croft—the girl called Lillah Rae, but no kin of yours, for she is the baby Lillah for Mrs. Rae, the unloved wife—the child of Mrs. Hugh Soltaire, and may Heaven forgive my sin!"

CHAPTER XLII.

WHEN Brian Rae left his father's room so hastily that day, it was with the firm determination to see his parents married again before the set of sun, if it could possibly be accomplished without injury to his father's poor hold on life.

He had a brief talk with Doctor Deane, who agreed with him that the consummation of so joyful an event ought to do good to the patient, giving him new hold on life, if such a thing were possible in his precarious state.

"I do not wish to deceive you," he said, with professional frankness. "The case is serious. I am not frightened at the scalp-wound, because it is doing nicely, and the compound fracture of the leg, below the knee, might get well in six weeks if the patient will lie in bed all that time; but there are symptoms of internal injuries that make me uneasy. If I am mistaken about that, he may pull through."

"Heaven grant it!" cried Brian, fervently.

"And, as you say," continued the doctor, "whether he lives or dies, it will be a comfort to him to marry his divorced wife over again, so I will go with you to get the license and the clergyman."

So, together with Darcy Cathcart, they went

to arrange the necessary details, and in their absence there occurred that scene by the death-bed of Emma Goring that was to make such a change in the destinies of Brian and Lillah, the sorely tried lovers.

When they returned, several hours later, with the minister, Mrs. Croft was informed of what was about to occur, and begged her new-found nephew to let her have the services of the man of God first for a dying sinner.

"Poor Emma Goring is going fast, and she is afraid to die, poor soul! We must try to hold a light for her feet as she goes groping down into the dark valley," she said, pitifully.

"Has her life been so wicked?" he asked, wonderingly; and the old lady answered:

"She has lived without God, and her sins are many. She made a most interesting confession awhile ago, and I would like for you to go and hear it, dear nephew, from Madame Soltaire, while the minister is engaged with Emma."

Mrs. Croft spoke with such a glad and cheerful smile, that he was quite puzzled.

He was sorry for the dying woman, but not much interested in her sins and confessions. His thoughts were hovering around Lillah.

She had been carried unconscious from Mr. Rae's room, and only revived to go into such hysterical spasms that they almost feared for her life. It was thought best to quiet her by strong opiates, and she had been sleeping heavily now for hours.

Poor Lillah! They had thought the truth would not shock her now, because she was betrothed to another; but they had been terribly mistaken. The hopeless love that had tortured her heart with secret pain threatened to end in death or madness now that they had told her that Brian was her brother.

With an aching heart, the young man turned his steps to her door to ask Madame Soltaire how the hapless girl fared.

Meanwhile, the lady had hurried from Emma's death-bed back to Lillah's room.

Knelling down, she pressed joyful kisses on the sleeping face, so pale and woeful even in slumber, so that it was easy to guess at last the guarded secret of that young heart—the love that had never strayed from its object through long and hopeless years.

Softly, tenderly, the happy mother drew aside the soft folds of lace and linen; and laid bare the beautiful white bosom of her daughter, searching until she found, just above the heart, a remembered birthmark—a tiny crimson cross.

"The birthmark of the Solitaires! Oh, how well I remember this! Oh, my darling, my own, you are indeed my lost treasure! No wonder that I have always loved you so!—It was the mother-heart that claimed you!" she cried, gladly, longing for Lillah to awake and learn the happy truth that she was her own daughter, and not at all related to Brian, whom she might marry when she would, only for the rash promise given to Darcy Cathcart in a moment of reckless pride.

"Poor fellow! This will be sad news for him; but I believe that he will be generous to dear Lillah," she concluded; and sat down to watch the sleeper with the glad eyes of love.

It was awhile later that she heard a timid rap at the door, and found Brian waiting outside, with a grave, and face, though he said, cheerfully:

"I have come to invite you and Lillah to a wedding."

"A wedding!"

In a few words he told her of the reconciliation between his father and mother, and the impending marriage.

She congratulated him warmly, and said, meaningly:

"I will be glad to be present at the ceremony; but my daughter is asleep."

Brian started wildly, and echoed:

"Your daughter!"

"Yes, Brian," and she drew him gently into the room, "Come and look at her, how pale and ill she lies, almost stricken to death by the thought that she was your sister. Oh, I have such happy news for you both, Brian!"

"She is stirring, she is waking!" he exclaimed,



EVERYONE WAS LISTENING WITH SUPPRESSED EXCITEMENT TO MRS. GASCOIGNE'S STORY

eagerly; and, indeed, at that moment the girl opened wide her large blue eyes with a dazed look.

Madame Soltaire, all joyful excitement, covered her daughter's face with kisses, exclaiming:

"Oh, Lillah, oh, Brian, such joyful news! I have found out that you are my lost daughter, my darling! You know, Brian, you always declared we resembled each other. Well, the nurse stole her from me to sell her to your father's second wife; for she deceived her husband, the wicked woman; she never had a child of her own. That dying woman in yonder, Emma Goring, has confessed everything. You and Lillah are not brother and sister at all, but lovers as in past days. Kiss her, Brian, if you wish, and be happy again."

He bent down to obey, but drew back again, with a cry of grief:

"I cannot. She is promised to my cousin."

"He will give her back her freedom when he learns the truth, for he has a noble nature," cried Madame Soltaire, and the event proved that she was right.

Darcy Cathcart's heart was very sad already, for Lillah's grief had shown him but awhile ago that he could never hope to win her heart; so, when he heard the wonderful news, and saw the new joy on Lillah's lovely face, he said, generously:

"Lillah, I have long known of your past love affair with Brian, and since things have fallen out so happily for you, I will restore you the troth-plight so lately given, and trust to time to heal my heart-wound. To-morrow is Christmas, you know, and I shall present you as a precious gift to Brian."

Oh, how thankful they were for his generosity, and how glad that another love cured his heart in a year, though they were touched when they saw that she resembled Lillah in her type—dark eyes and golden hair. It showed them plainly how deep had been his love.

Lillah was well again almost in a minute, in her new joy, and anxious to witness the second

marriage ceremony between Brian's parents; so presently the same group of the morning gathered in the room, and the grave clergyman, who had just closed the eyes of Emma Goring, after teaching her soul to find rest in Heaven, joined the hands of Godfrey Rae and his Marion for the journey of life, while he solemnly invoked a blessing on them all.

Godfrey Rae could not die now. Life had grown too sweet again. Events proved that the physician's fear of internal injuries was unfounded. He began to convalesce slowly but surely under his wife's love and care, looking forward to happy years together in the golden future.

Emma Goring was buried in London, and as she had no known relative anywhere, Mrs. Croft was the chief mourner at the funeral, and she took care to have a neat stone raised above the grave.

In a few days the party at the hotels separated, Godfrey Rae's wife and son remaining with him to aid in his tedious convalescence, and Madame Soltaire returning to her home with her daughter, taking the ailing Mrs. Croft as their guest.

"I am very sorry to lose you as a niece, Lillah," sighed the old lady, who was greatly softened now by the hurrying events.

"Do not grieve over that, dear aunt, for I will restore the kinship in the spring, and in the meantime you have gained me as a nephew," laughed Brian, who was handsome as a picture in his new happiness.

"That is true; and I am proud of my new nephew and his mother, too!" cried the old lady.

Brian's mother had taken the first opportunity to make her peace with Lillah.

"Dearest, I was cruel to you once, but I am a changed woman now, and I love you dearly since I know that you never belonged to that woman I hated so. Can you forgive me—if not for my own sake, because you will be Brian's wife!"

Lillah, understanding everything now, gladly accorded forgiveness and sympathy that soon ripened into love.

In the spring when Mr. Rae was well and strong again, his son was married to Lillah from her mother's home—Fairlawn. It was a grand wedding, and Lillah, the fairest bride ever seen. They remained with Madame Soltaire until Love's Retreat was rebuilt, then made their home with his parents while Mrs. Croft remained ever afterward with Lillah's mother, who would not permit her to return to her homely home.

"We are two lonely old widows. Let us be company for each other," she said with pensive cheerfulness.

One thing that transpired touched Lillah very much, and showed her the tenderness of Arthur's love.

Madame Soltaire said to Mr. Rae, while he still lay on his bed of suffering:

"That fortune Lillah has been enjoying as your daughter, Mr. Rae must be restored to you now, as she never had any legal right to it."

Mr. Rae looked embarrassed a moment, then frankly explained:

"On the day that Brian found out that Lillah was supposedly his sister he insisted on making over to her use enough of his private fortune to insure her the luxuries of life in lieu of happiness."

"And it will now form part of her marriage settlement," added Brian.

Tears sprang to Lillah's eyes as she murmured: "Oh how noble and generous you have been all these years while I thought you so weak and cowardly, and tried in vain to hate you! But all the while—"

Brian drew her to his heart, and finished the sentence for her, very low and tenderly:

"All the while I loved you better than you knew."

[THE END.]

OLD Christmas fare did not include the modern Christmas bird—the turkey—a roasted peacock taking its place on the festive board.





LETTICE DISCUSSES THE QUESTION OF A SITUATION WITH MADAME DE MONORY.

## JACK NORTH'S SECRET.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

It is quite possible for a woman to be a model of Christian virtues; to give up her whole life to good works, and yet to be profoundly ignorant of what goes on in her own family; so to say, under her eye.

Madame de Monory was a living instance of this. Since her husband's death her days had been spent in charity. She was a generous, unselfish woman, and had done much good in her generation; but it must be confessed there was one person she neglected strangely—her own son.

And yet she loved him dearly. As a tiny child in petticoats, as a little boy in velvet suits, Victor had been constantly with her, and had shared (compulsorily) in many of her good works. But from the time he came to school-age, he gradually drifted out of her keeping, and, perhaps, circumstances and his father's will had as much to do with this as his mother's own act.

The late Monsieur de Monory was, before anything else, a man of the world. He held an opinion—once common enough—that the religion of a family should be represented by its women, while the men should "have some license." He had married his wife because he was intoxicated with her beauty. He realised all too soon that they were utterly unsuited; the English heiress being a born old maid in tastes and feelings, having no sympathy whatever with masculine weakness.

To leave Victor in such hands would be for him to grow up a milkop, so the father appointed two guardians, friends of his own, who could be relied on to give the manly element to his son's character. These gentlemen were to have a free hand in the management of Victor from the time he was nine years old; only they were to do nothing to purposely wound his mother.

Long before Victor was nine Madame had

become swallowed up in such a whirl of charitable duties as to have no time for her little boy. Instead of questioning the character of the school he was despatched to, she felt thankful he was off her hands. From that time they grew apart. Madame lived so entirely in her own world that she knew very little of what went on outside it.

To-day, if asked her opinion of her son she would have said that Victor was a fine, spirited young fellow, just fit to shine in society; and that, when he married and settled down, he would be as great a credit to his name as his dear father had been!

She never dreamed of the truth. That Victor was one of the fastest men in Paris; that ruined homes and blighted lives could be traced to him, and that more than one girl had sought refuge in the Seine, driven to a shameful death by reason of his broken promises.

Victor himself looked on his mother as a saint, and was careful, on the rare occasions when they talked together, to say nothing to shock her prejudices; for the rest, he thought he was no worse than other men, and had not the least doubt that when the time came for him to "Ranger" himself (no English translation does justice to the French word), he should marry and make an admirable specimen of domestic life.

And this was the man who fell in love with Lettice Dene—otherwise his mother's *protégée*, Miss Brown; and gaily, unstable and wild as Victor was, this much must be conceded that his passion for Lettice was genuine, and the strongest feeling he had yet known.

He had begun by talking to her and trying to find out what kind of a soul went with that wistful face, those clear limpid eyes; he ended by being so much in love as to feel extremely doubtful of his next step.

He could not marry her,—he, the last of a grand old name, must not ally himself with a girl whom his mother had rescued (he soon knew Lettice's story) from a gambling hell. No, marriage was impossible; and yet Lettice was so charming!

her shy grace so captivated him that he hated the bare thought of leaving her free for another man to woo and win.

Of the third course he could not think. Yet he might come to it by and bye. He had betrayed girls as pure and innocent as Lettice before now, but then she was beneath his own roof, the sanctity of his mother's home protected her, and she seemed so utterly indifferent to him, to all he had to offer her, that Victor was piqued into more eager pursuit; and there were times when he fancied the girl would be cheaply bought by the sacrifice of his liberty and the gift of a plain gold ring.

Probably the intercourse would never have advanced so far, but that Bridget was away. That devoted waiting-woman had a holiday once a year, and always spent it in England. With Mrs. Mills away, there was no one to trouble particularly about Miss Brown. It is true Madame de Monory was kindhearted itself when she remembered the girl's existence, and was always saying she "should hear of something soon," but meanwhile Lettice was lonely, and would have been idle had not Victor requested her, as a favour to himself, to translate a quaint old manuscript into English. This work she pursued in the library, and Victor gave her a great deal of his assistance and companionship.

"The first of June!" said Lettice one morning, when they were talking, they always spoke English, which was, indeed, quite familiar to Victor. "Oh, I do hope Madame will find me a situation soon. I seem to have been here so long!"

"I must say you are not flattering," returned Victor. "First you express a wish to leave my house, then you go on to say the time spent here has seemed tedious."

"I must have expressed myself badly," said the girl, simply, "for I could not be so ungrateful as that. I only meant that I don't want to be idle any longer, and that just because your mother has been so kind to me I ought not to impose on her generosity."

"She loves to have you here," said Victor,

mendaciously, for he believed his mother hardly knew her *protégées* by sight except the latest arrival, "and I cannot spare you."

There was no mistaking the emphasis on the pronoun; for the first time Lettice felt embarrassed in the young Frenchman's company, for the first time she blushed crimson.

"Mrs. Mills will be here next week," said Lettice, slowly. "I will get her to go round with me to one of the Governess Agencies, I daresay Madame de Monory is too busy to spare the time."

"Bridget is only a servant, why consult her? I could give you much better advice."

"I don't think you know so much about governesses," said Lettice, who had now completely recovered her self-possession.

"Try me."

She shook her head.

"This is Thursday, so I have not long to wait, and I think Mrs. Mills would be my best adviser."

"You are very unkind. Look here, Miss Brown, why should you be a governess at all?"

"Because one must earn one's own living, and—I think I prefer that way on the whole."

"Why not be a companion?"

"I used to think I should prefer it, but a companion would be always seeing pleasure and yet not sharing it; she would always be about outside, and I think I prefer to be a governess. Besides, companionships are hard to get."

"Not always, I could tell you of one now."

"Really! Lettice was interested. "And do you think I should suit the lady?"

"I am quite sure you would give every satisfaction."

"Will you tell me about it?"

He hesitated. Was she a prude? Would she be shocked? And, after all, could he bring himself to shadow the perfect innocence of that sweet face? Then he forgot all scruples, and remembered only the passion raging at his heart.

Suddenly, without a word of warning, he caught her in his arms, and held her crushed against his heart, while he rained burning hot kisses on her lips.

She struggled desperately in his grasp, at last she freed herself and stood before him panting, indignant.

"How dare you," she cried, angrily.

He only thought how charming she looked with those flashing eyes and bright, pink-hued cheeks.

"Shall I do it again?" he asked, mockingly.

"I assure you I should have no objection," then seeing her anger was real, not feigned, he changed his tone. "You mustn't make such a fuss about a trifle, little one; it means that I love you, that I won't let you go away and be shut up in some dreary old school-room, but you must stay with me and learn not to be afraid of kisses!"

Every spark of brightness had died out of the girl's face, leaving it white and mournful, but she was very far from understanding the base motive of Victor's wooing. He hardly knew whether to be relieved or amused at her next words, which showed plainly she believed he was offering her his hand and name, not seeking to ruin her for his pleasure.

"I am very sorry," the girl said, simply, "but it can never be. I shall never marry as long as I live."

"And why not?" demanded Victor de Monory, who thought it just as well to leave her mistake uncorrected.

She looked at him with a strange, dreamy expression in her beautiful eyes.

"You see I believe in love."

"So do I," said Victor, positively, "but surely that is an argument in my favour."

"Ah, but I think people should only marry where they love, and I don't love you."

"You might in time," suggested Victor, who felt it strange to have the offer he had never intended to make so positively refused. "I am not such a very objectionable fellow."

"Oh, no, you have always been very kind to me until to-day."

"Most girls would not call my kisses unkindness," he protested, but she did not seem to hear.

"It won't matter to you much," she went on, "for when I get a situation I shall go away, and you will never see me again. Besides, in France girls marry to please their families, without minding whether they care for the bridegroom, so you are sure to find a suitable wife."

"I could find a dozen," he retorted, "but I want only you."

At that moment he had strung himself up to believe that his intentions were honourable after all, and he was even willing to pay the price of matrimony to possess that fair, white girl soul.

"You will soon get over it," replied the girl, calmly. "I am not in the least fitted to be a great lady, and I am sure you will be grateful to me by-and-by for refusing the honour you would have done me."

Victor doubted it.

"Please let me pass," she entreated—he stood between her and the door. "I want to go upstairs."

"I will let you go on one condition, that you promise not to leave this house unknown to me."

"I promise willingly. I could not leave it till I have a situation, for I know no one in Paris."

She sped on her way upstairs, leaving Victor de Monory more in love with her than ever, and quite decided that if no lower price than a wedding ring would win her, even that price should be paid.

But for Lettice all comfort and content in the beautiful house was gone. She wanted nothing so much as to get away. She had not in her innocence understood the nature of Victor's courtship, but she had felt the indignity of the caresses taken by force. She felt ashamed when she remembered how he had held her in his arms and raised his hot kisses on her lips. She wanted to escape from him, to breathe a different atmosphere. She could not have put the sensation into words, but she did not feel safe where Victor was.

She sought an interview with Madame de Monory, and repeated her request for employment. Madame looked at her curiously. A servant had just whispered in her ear something of those meetings in the library. Madame would have scorned to suspect her son, but might it not be that there was danger to Miss Brown in his fascinating society. It would be a pity for the poor girl to enter on a new career burdened with a hopeless attachment.

"I am very sorry, Miss Brown," her voice was just a trifle less sweet than usual, "but I really know of no situation you would like."

"I would like anything that was honest," said Lettice. "I think I would rather go out as a lady's-maid than remain idle."

Madame de Monory looked grave.

"I can do better for you than that. At the convent school, near my country estate, they are seeking a young lady to teach English. They would have preferred one of the true faith, but I think my influence would get over the objection of your being a heretic, if you undertook not to attempt to convert the children."

"I could readily do that. I would never seek to change anyone's faith, madame, because between the old belief and the new there must come a time of doubt—and doubt is terrible."

With infinite difficulty madame disinterred a letter from a pile of dusty papers. It was from the Mother of the Convent, and thanked her for some handsome offering made to the school. Going on to speak of the required teacher, the Mother wrote that she must speak and read English perfectly, must be willing to undertake some of the supervision of the younger pupils, and be content with the salary of four hundred francs.

"Sixteen pounds a year," said Lettice thoughtfully, "but then I should not have to dress much."

"No, and there are no holidays. I do not think the position good enough for you, but if you wish to try I think I can obtain it for you."

"And you will tell the Mother that I am a Protestant."

"Yes," Madame looked at her sharply,

"They have had three Protestant teachers already at the Convent."

"And they did not give satisfaction!" asked Lettice, thinking there was something strange in the lady's manner.

"They gave every satisfaction. They are there now—but they are not Protestants."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that they renounced their errors. One of them is the very Mother Superior who now writes. Another is a trusted nun. The third sleeps in the convent graveyard—but she died in the true faith!"

"I am not afraid."

Madame de Monory smiled.

"If you had any relations to whom your change of faith might bring pain, I believe I should not send you, for I was never given to proselytism, but if you stand alone in the world and like the idea of this peaceful life, I will write to the Mother to-night," she smiled again; "but I know in a year or two, when I am at Pont-aux-dames, I shall receive an invitation to your *fête*."

"I don't understand what you mean by my *fête*. Surely not my birthday."

"Oh, no. The day of your admission into the true church."

Either the Mother must have been very anxious to secure an English teacher, or much impressed by the account of Miss Brown, for she wrote by return of post engaging Madame de Monory's *protégée* at a salary of sixteen pounds a-year, and desiring that the young lady might be at the convent on Tuesday.

"That is well," said Madame. "Mills will be here and I can send her with you. You are much too pretty to travel alone."

Victor had tried in vain to obtain another interview with Lettice. At last, offended by what he called her "airs," he went off into the country with a friend from Saturday to Monday. He met such pleasant people at his friend's house that he was easily persuaded to remain till Tuesday. When he returned home he found among his letters a small gray envelope, which had not been through the post, and which he guessed at once was a note from Lettice.

"Ah!" he muttered, "I have brought you to your senses, have I, Miss Brown. You find you can't play the high and mighty with me without the risk of losing me altogether."

But the note hardly carried out this idea. It was a very simple farewell. Madame de Monory herself and the most critical of other matrons, might have read it without thinking it anything but appropriate. Certainly no one would ever have guessed from the letter that its writer had had love passages with Victor:—

"DEAR MONSIEUR DE MONORY.

"You asked me to tell you when I left Paris, so I write to say that your mother has kindly found me a situation in the country, and I start to-morrow."

"Thanking you and Madame very much for the kindness shown me here,—I am, yours gratefully,

L. BROWN."

Monsieur Victor de Monory tore the letter into shreds, and felt defeated. For the first time in his life he had not come off triumphant in a love affair.

At that moment he would have thought his grand old name a cheap exchange for a touch of Lettice's red lips.

## CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. SHATON was a most trying woman to live with, a very selfish one where her own interests were concerned, and by no means an easy task-mistress; but as no one is wholly bad, so the widow had some good qualities, and one of them was a staunch faith in the people she really liked.

Jack North was a favourite with her, and she would have done a great deal to serve him, so now, instead of going into hysterics at the news so suddenly disclosed to her, she kept her presence of mind, and was quite equal to the occasion.



"Please shut the door, nurse," she said, quietly, "and sit down. Perhaps you will tell me all about this sudden arrival. I am sure that Sir John was not expecting his—" she paused perceptibly, and then added, "wife."

"I think I had better speak first, Aunt Susan," said Jack, with a miserable attempt at ease; but I must assure you, to begin with, that I had not the least idea that these ladies were coming to Ashleigh, and that I should never have expected them here."

But the nurse interposed.

"I have to return to London if possible to-night, and I am anxious to acquit myself of my trust."

"I am the head-attendant at Dr. Matland's private asylum for insane ladies, situated at Croy, France. Some time ago Mrs. Morris entrusted her daughter to the doctor's care; it was at first, we feared, a hopeless case, but care and attention, ease of mind and a quiet life, have at last done their work, and the young lady is now perfectly restored."

"Mrs. Morris was considerably in arrears with her payments, and, upon being notified of her daughter's recovery, she declared herself unable to take charge of her. The poor lady's husband, she said, had recently succeeded to the family estates. If the patient was sent, under safe escort, to Ashleigh, Sir John North would, doubtless, provide for her future, and pay all outstanding claims."

"The doctor's orders were imperative that I should only resign Lady North to her husband's care. Finding Sir John from home, and his housekeeper receiving us with very scant civility, it seemed best to me to come on here, where, I was told, I should be sure to find Sir John. For my intrusion on you, madam," she bowed to Mrs. Seaton, "I can only apologise."

The unfortunate cause of all the trouble sat perfectly still. The nurse had pushed a chair to her on entering, and she had obediently sunk down on it. She had neither moved nor spoken since. She betrayed not the least emotion on seeing her husband; she seemed, indeed, dead to feelings of any kind. And Mrs. Seaton decided that, in curing her malady, Dr. Matland had left her with a beautiful body and no soul.

As for Jack he understood that this was a last stroke of Mrs. Morris's malice. No doubt she had heard that he had prevented Blanche from becoming Lady Strathallen, and this was her revenge.

Sir John turned to the nurse.

"Tell Dr. Matland to send me the account, and he shall have a cheque by return of post. Must you really leave us? Can't you stay at least until I have been able to make some arrangements for the comfort of your charge?"

The nurse shook her head.

"I have to meet a patient at Victoria to-morrow morning, and accompany her to Croy. You need be under no anxiety about Lady North, she is perfectly cured."

She rose to go. She refused all Mrs. Seaton's offers of hospitality; but she glanced at Sir John as though she would like a word alone with him, and he followed her to the gate.

"Dr. Matland wished me to tell you he had no alternative but to send the poor lady to you. She was quite sane. Her mother refused to take charge of her, and she was not strong enough to struggle for herself."

"I know. It is not Dr. Matland that I blame. Nurse, can you give me Mrs. Morris's address?"

She gave him that of a Paris pension, adding—

"But Dr. Matland believed she was only there for a short time. Sir John, he wished me to say that, in sending Lady North to you, he was not incurring a long responsibility on you; she cannot live."

"You mean that she is ill?"

"I should say that she could not live three months. We have often noticed that in her form of mania, as the mental strength and health return, that of the body decreases. She will not trouble you long."

Mrs. Seaton had been very cruel to her daughter and David Fane, but she was disposed to pity Jack

intensely. She came to meet him in the little passage.

"I have sent Julia to sit with—with Lady North. Will you tell me about her now?"

She led the way to the little dining-room, the apartment she generally shunned; all her peevish ways and selfish fancies seemed to have disappeared, the emergency showed her at her very best.

Jack's story was a sad one. It explained all that had puzzled his friends in his past life; and, although Susan Seaton was an essentially selfish woman, her very heart ached for the poor fellow as she listened.

He had met the Morris family six months after he left England. The mother, a very fascinating woman; Isabel, a lovely girl of eighteen; and Blanche, a mere child. The courtship was a brief one, and he saw very little of his fiancée except in her mother's presence. It was agreed between him and Mrs. Morris to keep the marriage secret from Sir Godfrey, since he had already hinted his desire that Jack should marry Julia. Mrs. Morris declared there was no harm in the concealment; and that if Miss Seaton married someone else they could at once enlighten Sir Godfrey.

Jack took Isabel to Italy, with Antoine as valet and general factotum; in a month he was conscious that his wife was not as other women were, in three he knew that her intellect was weak. He endured a time of misery until his child was born. The boy died, and his mother recovered from her illness, to be hopelessly insane.

"I thought then," went on poor Jack, "my troubles were greater than I could bear. I wanted to go home and make a clean breast of everything to my uncle, but that she-devil prevented me. If Sir Godfrey cut off my allowance who was to provide for Isabel? The secret must still be kept. She would devote herself to her afflicted child, and I could pay her a fixed sum yearly."

"I hated the woman, for I knew she had plotted my misery. She knew perfectly well that Isabel was no fit subject for marriage and motherhood. Then I began to have grave doubts as to Mrs. Morris's true character, and at last I discovered Morris was an assumed name, and she was really the widow of the late Lord Strathallen's half-brother."

"That dreadful man who died by his own hand."

"Ay, he died insane, and his malady was inherited by his eldest child—my wife."

Mrs. Seaton listened with unflagging interest.

"There's not much more to tell. In due time I heard from Mrs. Morris announcing Isabel's death, and bringing a demand for a hundred pounds for the last sad claim. Fool that I was I sent it, and asked no questions. I knew the woman was a worthless adventurer, and yet I took her word on such a subject."

"But I can't make out why she should deceive you," put in Mrs. Seaton, "by telling that she deprived herself of your help in supporting her daughter."

"Ay! but Blanche was growing up, and her head was set on her making a good match."

She wanted to get rid of me lest I should enlighten a possible lover that the curse of insanity was in the family."

"The woman must be a fiend."

"She may have had another reason. She knew from me that my uncle was anxious for a marriage between me and Julia. Aunt Susan, I can hardly go on, it is too awful. She may have thought that if I married Julia she could obtain a regular income from me as hush money, seeing that she could at any moment prosecute me for bigamy."

"Poor Julia!" and Mrs. Seaton looked very pale. "It is terrible to think of."

"Well, the rest is soon told. I travelled about hoping to forget my troubles, then when Sir Godfrey wrote urging me to return, I thought I could safely do so. It was three years since I had seen my wife's face. It was more than two since I had received the news of her death. I came home, but I was miserable. The burden of a secret was ever between me and my old friends. Then just before my uncle's death

another blow fell. The servant, who had been with me all through my married life wrote that he had seen Isabel in the outskirts of Paris. He had ascertained that she was in a private asylum under her maiden name. I went down to Croy and saw Dr. Matland. I exacted from him a solemn promise that he would write with his own hand and tell me if my wife died. But at that time there seemed no chance of her recovering her senses. He believed she would die mad. From that journey I was recalled to England by Sir Godfrey's death."

"My poor boy! What you must have suffered."

Jack sighed.

"Through it all I was thankful that Lettice Dane's life stood between me and Ashcroft. If I had been master of the Croft, general curiosity would have been aroused that I did not marry. If I had been a wealthy baronet Mrs. Morris would certainly have pestered me with appeals for help."

"And you have never heard of her since?"

"I have never seen her. I have heard plenty of her. She and Blanche swindled a French landlady out of fifty pounds by means of a fictitious cheque. Then they came to England, their object to extort hush money from Sir Godfrey. His death crushed that project. They were actually in the railway-carriage when Lettice came to the Croft and Blanche warned her not to trust me."

Mrs. Seaton smiled.

"These women were like your evil geni, Jack."

"Ay! Blanche actually forced her way into the Croft as Lettice's maid."

"What, Mary?"

"Mary. I caught her meeting Strathallen in the wood. I recognised her at once, and 'had it out' with her. I told her she and her mother could be sentenced to penal servitude for the matter of the cheque, and that as her mother had obtained a hundred pounds from me on false pretences (for my wife's funeral), I could bring a second charge against them. And I would have brought it too had she not accepted my terms."

"And that is why she went so suddenly?"

"Yes."

"And she had stolen money before?"

"It amounted to that. She got some one to cash a cheque for her which she knew to be worthless."

"Then you may depend upon it, Jack, she stole the diamonds."

"I thought it was proved at the time that she had no chance of getting at them."

"I have thought over that affair till I felt nearly dazed, Jack; and I have come to the conclusion that Julia never really looked the door of the jewel safe. She turned the key, but did not look in. Then, you see, Mary White—I mean Blanche Morris could have left her own room in the night and gone to the strong room—she might easily have concealed the diamonds about her dress. As for the crime being planned beforehand I don't suppose it was; probably she was wild at being dismissed so suddenly, and decided she would not go empty-handed."

"I expect you are right," said Jack, sadly; "but it's a hateful thought."

Mrs. Seaton brought him back to more pressing matters.

"What are you going to do about—about your wife?"

He shuddered.

"I can't take her home. My old housekeeper is not fit for such a charge. To-morrow I must advertise for a home for a lady of weak intellect; but for to-night—"

"Listen to me," said Mrs. Seaton, gravely; "you had better have her here."

"Here; but you and Julia!"

"I am not frightened of insane people. Besides, we have the doctor's testimony she is cured. You have your future and your good name to think of. Leave your wife with me for at least a fortnight. If I find the charge too onerous she can then be removed to the house of some doctor who takes such cases as boarders. I will make a round of calls to-morrow, and announce your romantic marriage, and that the state of your wife's health alone has caused it to be kept secret."

I shall introduce her to everyone who calls here as Lady North."

"I can never be grateful enough for such kindness."

"I never do things by halves. I think you have suffered terribly over this business. Jack and I want to help you. Besides, I can't forget what Julia has escaped."

Sir John lowered his voice.

"Don't you think the recollection of that might soften you to Denis Fane. He really is a very good fellow, and he loves Jill with all his heart. Because my married happiness has been shipwrecked it makes me the more anxious that Jill should have things her own way."

"Julia is a very rebellious girl," said Julia's mother; "but, perhaps, after all I was a little hard on her."

"I can't see her to-night," said Jack, "will you tell her my story or part of it, and may Heaven bless you for your kindness to Isabel, Aunt Susan."

Mrs. Seaton found that Julia had put Lady North to bed in her own room, for Sir John had lingered late, and the poor young wife had looked tired out.

"She is fast asleep," said Jill, whose eyes were wet with tears; "of course it is terrible for Jack; but, mother, I can't help feeling sorry for Isabel here. What will become of her?"

"I have offered to keep her here for a time. She can't go back to him until he has found a proper caretaker and companion for her, even if he wished it."

Mrs. Seaton told Julia her nephew's story, and the girl listened with a great silent pity.

"It is terrible," she said, when her mother paused, "think what they both have suffered; and after Jack trying so hard to keep the secret of his marriage, is it hard it should be revealed like this."

"It is the best thing in the world for him!"

"Why?"

"Because, try as one would not to think of it, there always seemed a mystery in Jack's life. One felt there was something in those years he spent abroad that could not be spoken of. It is far better that his friends and neighbours should know the truth, and that his story was one of pain and sorrow not grief and shame."

"I wish Lettice were here!"

"What on earth for?"

"I think she would comfort Isabel better than anyone. Lettice always seemed to know just what to say to people in trouble. I—I am very sorry for them; but I have not Lettice's gift for telling them so."

"Well, I am very tired," said Mrs. Seaton, "and I think I shall go to bed."

She got as far as the door and then she turned back to her daughter.

"I think I must let you have your own way, Jill," she said, quietly. "Now I see how my match-making would have blighted your life. I must leave the choice to you. You can write to Denis Fane to-morrow, and say I will consent, but you are not to think of getting married till January."

Jill went to bed the happiest girl in the county and yet she felt a pang of sorrow for the stranger, not so much older than herself, whose marriage had proved such a failure.

The rumour spread like wildfire. Sir John North had deceived them all, he had been married for years and shut up his wife in a lunatic asylum, so as to deceive his uncle. Lady North had run away, and having eluded her pursuers had reached Ashleigh, and so on.

It was then that Mrs. Seaton came to the rescue. The day after Isabel's arrival her hostess made twenty calls—she took the people she was intimate with in the morning or she never could have done it—and at every house she told the same story.

Her nephew, Sir John North, had married romantically abroad, and as the poor young bride went out of her mind, the union had been kept a profound secret. Lady North had suddenly recovered and was now her guest.

"And Sir John is overjoyed, of course," said one rather spiteful neighbour. "I wonder he

did not take her to his own home and kill the fatted calf."

Mrs. Seaton smiled placidly.

"Lady North is by no means a prodigal. Sir John is naturally thankful for the change in his wife's state, but Ivy Cottage is too lonely and isolated to suit anyone who has suffered from melancholy. If Lady North's health improves my nephew will take a house in Ashleigh and make a proper establishment for his wife, until then she will be my guest."

In her new-found goodwill, Mrs. Seaton included the Fanes in her visits, and it was generally understood at the lawyer's red brick house that there was peace henceforward between them and Lorne Cottage, and that Julia would some day be allowed to marry Denis.

Isabel North fell into her place at the cottage quite naturally. She called Julia by her christian name, and addressed her hostess as "Aunt Susan." She gave very little trouble, needed very little amusing, and both ladies grew attached to her for her sweet face and sad, gentle ways, but though the great Dr. Matland had discharged her as cured, though there was no sign of madness about her, she never seemed to Jill like a woman, in intellect and understanding she had remained a child of twelve years old.

Sir John came sometimes of an evening and was very kind to the new inmate. He called her "Belle" and greeted her always with a friendly handshake. He was very gentle with her, but his manner did not seem like the manner of a husband to his wife.

As the weeks passed on there was no talk of Isabel leaving Lorne Cottage, the three ladies drove over to Sir John's little house one day, and drank tea with him, but the girl showed no desire to linger behind when the Seaton's started for home. It was as though it did not dawn on her that her rightful place was with her husband with the father of her child.

"She is very beautiful," said Jill one day to her mother, "very sweet and gentle, but I can't see her and Jack together without feeling wretched."

"That's very foolish of you," retorted her mother. "What does Mr. Fane say to you?"

"He says he feels just the same. Isabel is so gentle and childlike one can't have an unkind thought of her, and yet all the while one feels she stands between Jack and happiness."

"Jack looks happy enough," said Mrs. Seaton, rather irritably, "and I am sure his wife is very little trouble to him."

There were tears in Jill's eyes as she answered, "But Jack has such a great loving heart, and poor Isabel can never reach the depths of it. She is no more to him than a child friend, and yet so long as she lives, he can never have a wife of his own or a real home."

"You are much too romantic," said Mrs. Seaton. "I wish Jack would make his good-for-nothing sister-in-law give back the diamonds she stole, that would be more to the purpose."

The detectives employed by Mr. Carleton were warned to keep a sharp look out on Mrs. Morris and her daughter, and at length the latter was detected trying to sell several unset diamonds to a Paris dealer. She was arrested, ample evidence was forthcoming to identify them with the jewels stolen from Ashcroft, but the matter never reached a trial, Blanche disgorged all the diamonds remaining in her possession, and the prosecution was dropped.

If Lettice Dene returned to claim her jewels, one row of the diamond necklace was gone for ever, that was all.

And then in the cold short winter days which come before Christmas Isabel caught a severe cold. They thought nothing of it at first, then Dr. Hunt grew uneasy and declared that as soon as Lady North could travel they must take her to the south for the rest of the winter, Ashleigh was too cold for her.

Poor Isabel never journeyed to the Riviera; she took a longer journey whence no traveller returns. When the New Year dawned Sir John was really what he had thought himself before, a widower, and free from the entanglement of his youth.

(To be continued.)

## A LIFE'S REGRET.

—305—

(Continued from page 296.)

"Nothing you may say or do can injure me, you fool. I have nothing to lose; you have everything."

"I lost all I cared for, all I prized, long ago," she answered, despairingly. "Are you not content with your work? Love, and joy, and honour are not for me. You stole away all that should have been mine, and now you would take from me the very means of livelihood."

"I told you," he said, coarsely, "I would recompense you for that. Long before the money was gone you would have obtained employment elsewhere. You had really, for your own sake, better go."

"I suppose I ought to thank you for your advice, but I do not, neither shall I act upon it. You must remember good advice is rarely accepted."

He ignored her last words.

"You have contrived to prejudice Miss Roswell against me. I am not likely to forgive or forget that fact."

"You are wrong," Leonie said, calmly; "I have never spoken of you to her. Your name is so loathsome to me I could not breathe it."

"You think I am fool enough to believe you innocent. Pardon me, I am too well acquainted with woman's nature to be so easily duped."

"You fancy you understand women, but you don't; although, indeed, you should, having always done your best to win their hearts by way of amusement, so that you might have the pleasure of breaking them. There are many men like you; you are not unique by any means."

Then they were interrupted, but her words and her looks lingered with him, and goaded him on to a very delirium of madness. That evening he accompanied the Roswells to the opera, and in his heart he determined that before he left Irene he would know his fate.

Leonie was not of the party, for which he was unfeignedly glad. Her presence (bad as he was) always embarrassed him, and he wished to be quite at his ease, when he should honour Irene with the offer of his hand.

He hardly knew what passed through the long hours; all the liquid sweetness of the prima donna's voice was lost to him; he was deaf to the wonderful notes of the first tenor, and all through the drive home a voice cried in his ears, "Irene" and "Leonie," "Leonie" and "Irene."

Miss Templeton had gone to her own room, so the four—Mrs. Roswell and Aylmer, Irene and Fergus—sat down to supper together. When it was ended—Aylmer moved to the piano, and began to play an air from *Il Trovatore*. Mrs. Roswell fell asleep in her chair, so Fergus begged Irene to go with him into the conservatory. She scarcely knew how to refuse his request, so she went with him, unwillingly enough. He found her a seat, and took up a position by her, looking passionately down upon her blushing face.

"Miss Roswell," he said, "you must know why I have brought you here?" and as she made no reply, only blushed more deeply, he took courage to add, "It is to tell you that I love you more than any poor words of mine can say. It is to ask you to take pity upon me, and end my suspense. Irene, my darling Irene, what will you say to me?"

"Oh, Mr. Darrell," she answered, very much flattered, "I did not think—I did not guess—that—that—"

"That is a subterfuge," he said, sharply, "and unworthy of you. You knew very well what hopes I entertained regarding you. My dear, growing tender again, 'give me my answer, and for my love's sake let it be favourable!'"

"I am very sorry," she began, "but—but I am afraid I must give you pain. I do not care for you as you wish—I am even indifferent to you. Pray forgive me, and try to think no more of me."

"It is easy to say forget me, but I should find it impossible to obey you. I love you, and will



marry no other woman. Tell me, Irene, has Miss Templeton prejudiced you against me?"

"No," she answered, wonderingly; "she never speaks of you, and we are not on confidential terms. Why should you ask that?"

"Because she is my enemy," he said, tersely; then added, "You have refused my love now; but I will not think my suit hopeless, I will ask you again and again until, despite yourself, you answer as I would have you. Now let me take you back to the others;" he stooped and kissed her, despite all her remonstrances, then led her back to Aylmer and her aunt.

The next morning, early, he again presented himself, bringing Theodore with him; the latter looked anxious and depressed, for Fergus had told him on the way that he had a disclosure to make which would not redound to Miss Templeton's credit, and which would certainly destroy any love he (Theodore) might entertain for her.

Entering the room where Mrs. Roswell and Aylmer sat, he greeted the former with courteous gravity.

"Madam, I have come on a painful errand; it is connected with the young person in your employ, 'Miss Leonie Templeton.' She is not a fit companion for Miss Roswell."

## CHAPTER V.

AYLMER started impetuously to his feet.

"Whatever you have to say of Miss Templeton must be said in her presence."

"That is precisely what I wish, but I would ask that Miss Roswell should be absent; the story is unfit for her ears," said Fergus, very smoothly.

"It is a lie!" broke in Aylmer, whose most unvoiced excitement caused Mrs. Roswell great surprise, and elicited from her the gentle remonstrance.

"My dear, my dear, you are forgetting the courtesy due to a guest."

"No, I am not; and I may say now I am surprised Maxwell would stand calmly by whilst another man traduces the woman he loves. Ring the bell, mother; Irene shall be present to give her countenance and support to Miss Templeton. Gentlemen, be seated," and he moved from them to a little distance, where he stood grave and stern, with head slightly bent.

Irene came in first, a trifle nervous and confused; then they all waited Leonie's entrance. When Mrs. Roswell's message reached her she knew the blow had fallen, and for a moment meditated flight; but when she reflected that in her absence Fergus could malign her as he chose, and there would be none to defend her. So after a pause she went slowly downstairs and entered the room. She felt that after this hour she should see no more.

All eyes were turned upon her as she advanced to the centre. Aylmer stepped forward and placed a chair for her, saying, gently,—

"Don't be alarmed; we have implicit faith in you."

She remained standing, her hands loosely clasped before her, her head bent low.

Fergus glanced at her with a look of malicious triumph. Even now, when he was about to strike her so cruel a blow, he did not believe she would say aught against him, knowing well her almost quixotic generosity.

He began to speak in smooth, suave tones.

"It is my painful duty to inform you, Mrs. Roswell, that Miss Templeton is unfit to fill her present position; and you, Theodore, that no man with any vestige of manly spirit would make her his wife."

There was a dead silence, but Leonie never looked up, only seemed to droop more, as though the pain would hide her face from them all.

"Three years ago," continued Fergus, "she was living at Madrid with a man whom she then called husband, but she has no claim upon him—she was his mistress. She is a mother, but not a wife."

Theodore uttered a loud cry, and sprang to her side.

"Leonie," he implored, passionately, "say it

is not true. Oh! my love, my dear love, give him the lie!"

She lifted her eyes then, marked the shuddering repulsion on the faces of Mrs. Roswell and Irene. Aylmer she could not see—he had half-hidden himself among the curtains, and averted his face—then she said, dully,—

"It is true, and there stands the partner of my guilt!" pointing to Fergus.

A murmur of horror passed through the room. Theodore fell back from her, and for a moment seemed as if he would spring upon his cousin who, in the dismay and confusion occasioned by Leonie's words, was speechless. The girl broke the silence by saying, in the same dull voice,—

"Hear my story, so that when you most condemn you may most pity me. It seems to me that I have been more sinned against than sinning, but, then, I am incapable of judging my own conduct impartially. My mother, who was the daughter of the Duke of Alvaro, died when I was very young, and I lived almost alone with my father. I was nearly sixteen. Then the cholera began to rage in Madrid, and it swept off hundreds, my father and then only surviving relatives being among the victims."

"After his death it was found his affairs were hopelessly involved, and nothing remained for me. Then some old servants, who had taken a small hotel, came forward and offered me a home, which I gladly accepted. But I soon found life was a misery in that place; I was the drudge, the scapegoat. I had innumerable tasks to perform, and among them was ministering to the wants of the boarders. One day a new visitor came; his name was Fergus Darrell, and in those days he was very good to me. He told me he had seen me often in the streets, and longed to know me, but there had been no one to effect an introduction, and by mere chance he had discovered my home."

"I was so young, so miserable," she said, a pathetic break in her voice, "I was so innocent of the world and its ways, the duplicity of men, that I believed all he said implicitly; and when he told me he loved me, and would take me away where I might be happy, my passionate love and gratitude grew to worship, and I could have given up my life for him. He told me of years spent wholly together, and how he would never weary of me in any day to come. Oh! remember, remember, how mere a child I was! I listened to his sophistries. I believed him when he said in the sight of Heaven, because we loved each other truly, we were man and wife. So I left my wretched home for one he had made beautiful for me. It was like that in which I had spent my happy childhood, and with him I loitered through the rooms, or lingered in the orange groves. My joy was so great it was almost pain, and I had no thought of sin. I met the glances of men and women freely, being proud he had chosen me from all the world beside."

She lifted her head a moment, and met Mrs. Roswell's condemning eyes. Aylmer still stood apart from them all; Fergus glared upon her, but Theodore had his face bowed between his hands. She went on, with a quiver of pain in her voice.—

"That life lasted nearly a year, and then I saw a change in him, slight at first, but growing day by day, until I knew he did not love me, and then it seemed my heart would break. I strove by every means in my power to win him back; I put forth all my little accomplishments, but vainly. Then I passionately implored him to tell me my fault, that so I might remedy it; and he—oh! Heaven, he told me such unkind words as ours ended always in disgust, and showed me what I was. At first I scarcely understood, but when the full knowledge of my shame came upon me, I fell at his feet, and prayed him to kill me."

"He left me with an oath; and then I must have fainted, for I knew nothing more until I woke to find myself alone. He had gone leaving no trace behind. I must have been mad. I put together a few things, and, selling my ornaments started for England, believing that I should find him; almost trusting that after all he had spoken falsely, and that the law would help me to my rights. I reached London, a friendless, almost penniless, stranger; and whilst I was wandering

miserably about the streets I had the good fortune to meet my old nurse. She had married a pilot, but was then a widow, living on a small annuity. She took me home with her, and after a few days my baby was born. Oh, why must I tell you these things! Is not my shame too heavy to be borne without this awful exposure?"

No one spoke, no one moved, and she went on dreadingly.—

"When I looked on my baby's face, and knew he had no father, I cursed the man who had made me what I was, and placed a brand on my innocent child's brow. When I was well enough I sought and obtained employment. The rest of my life was uneventful until I went to Cheddar. Oh," breaking suddenly down, "have compassion on me! If I kept my secret who could blame me! I know too well that a man may sin again and again, and not be the less esteemed; I also knew that the woman who makes one false step is utterly condemned, irretrievably ruined! There is one law for the tempter, another for the tempted!"

She ceased, and then Theodore's voice, hoarse and strange, sounded through the room,—

"I will never forgive you that you won my love—that you have made life miserable for me. Each day the passion I had for you will become more resolved into hate!"

"Stay!" she cried, in heartrending tones; "have I not left you free? Oh! for Heaven's sake speak kindly to me now!—for the last time!"

He turned from her with a muttered imprecation.

Fergus said, sullenly,—

"You have heard what this woman says! Her story is a tissue of truth and falsehood. And, after all my fault is one common to men."

"True," rejoined Aylmer, speaking for the first time; then he moved to the unhappy woman and, despite his mother's remonstrance, before them all he took her slender hands in his, and said, clearly, "My dear, I do not hold you guilty. To me you will always be a wronged woman, and one deserving not only pity but love; and if"—here he paused and flashed a glance upon them all—"if my heart can content you, it is yours to-day and for ever; if my loving care can teach you forgetfulness of what has gone before, it shall never be withdrawn. Leonie, will you make me happy by being my wife?"

There was a fierce outcry, and a shrill scream from the other women, but Leonie saw nothing but this one generous man, heard no sound but his voice.

She lifted her eyes to his, and then all her hardly-kept composure broke down; and, flinging herself on her knees, she kissed his hands, and wept as though her heart would break, but more in passionate gratitude than from any other emotion, because his tender love and faith filled her whole soul with a desire to do something by which she could prove how deeply she felt his goodness.

Fergus Darrell looked down contemptuously at her, smiled scoffingly as his eyes glanced from her to Aylmer standing with bowed head and loving, anxious face, so full of pity—it seemed as an angel's. Then he said,—

"Pretty, but decidedly theatrical!"

"Will you marry me, Leonie! Get up, my dear, this is no position for you."

She obeyed his bidding, as she would any bidding of his now, and she answered, tremulously,—

"Your goodness kills my pride, and weighs down my very soul with a burden of gratitude, but I will not hide my shame under your honest name. Let me go now; I can bear no more."

"I shall still hope," he said, with grave tenderness, and so released her.

She walked towards the door, on her way pausing before Mrs. Roswell.

"You are a woman," she said simply, "and should feel some pity for me; remember, I was alone and in misery. I was so very, very young."

"You were not too young to distinguish between right and wrong," coldly.

She sighed heavily, and went on her way.

Irene drew her skirts close lest they should

touch this poor pariah, and so be contaminated. She and her aunt were good and virtuous women, but they were pitiless; they had never been tempted, and so had no compunction for the fallen.

Theodore held the door open for Leonie, and as she passed through she lifted her weary eyes to his.

"Forgive me!" she pleaded; "the wrong I did you was a small one, and not irreparable. You will forget me soon, and be happy with some other. All men forget more or less easily."

"I shall never forget and never forgive. I shall curse your name to my dying day!" he answered, fiercely, and without a word she passed on and went heavily upstairs.

"Life is over with me," she muttered, brokenly. "I have got my death-blow, and but for Lenny I would say thank Heaven. Oh! my heart, my broken heart, my soiled, degraded life!"

When she had left them, Aylmer turned upon the other men.

"Maxwell, I am disappointed in you; Darrell, I must request you to leave my house at once; your presence is an insult to my mother and cousin."

"I have only sinned as many a man has done before me, and you must be infatuated to believe all that woman says. I will not go until I have spoken to Miss Roswell. Irene, give me five minutes alone that I may justify myself to you as far as I am able."

"What you have to say to me you can say here," haughtily; "and I should imagine justification would be impossible. I can grant you no private interview."

"Seeing that it was useless to plead with her, Fergus Darrell said, desperately,—

"It must be as you wish, but I will not go in silence. I believed I was fond of Leonie Templeton in a fashion, but I swear I have never loved any woman but you. Last night I asked you to be my wife, now I repeat my request. Will you consent?"

"No, Mr. Darrell; for if I condemn her I hold you doubly guilty. Your protestations of love offend me, and I trust we shall never meet again."

He muttered something ugly below his breath, then turning to his cousin said, insolently,—

"I will talk to these people when they have recovered their reason. Come, Theodore."

"Not with you," fiercely. "Let me be; I am in a murderous mood."

"As you please," with ill-assumed nonchalance; "but it seems to me very foolish for old friends to quarrel over a fallen woman—a pariah."

In all her life Irene had never seen such a look of loathing and rage as flashed over Aylmer's face then.

"Go," he cried, with a menacing gesture; "this house never before harboured a prostitute and libertine."

And Fergus Darrell went from their midst. Theodore followed shortly after, and Aylmer was left with his mother and cousin; the former began to speak volubly.

"What possessed you to speak to that—that woman as you did? Do you suppose for an instant I would countenance her presence here, or receive her as my daughter? You must be mad to contemplate such an alliance. Fergus Darrell's deserted mistress—"

"Hush!" he said, so sternly that she was frightened; "you forget her wrongs. How cruel you women are to each other! I tell you candidly, mother, if at any future time she will listen to me I will make her my wife, and esteem myself a happy man."

"You will not expect me to visit you," Irene remarked, coldly. "A virtuous woman cannot countenance vice."

Leonie lay upon the couch in Mrs. Bailey's little room; Lenny played quietly in a corner with a few cards, a broken doll, and a horse without a tail.

It was August, and through all the weary weeks which had passed since she left the Ros-

vells she had grown weaker, paler, thinner, the very ghost of herself, but beautiful still, in a pathetic way that brought the tears to Nurse Bailey's eyes each time she looked upon her.

"Nurse," said the faint, sweet voice, "I should like to go to Cheddar. Doctor Somers said Hastings, but I don't want to hear the swish of the waves, or look each day on the wide expanse of water."

"Well, dear, we'll go to Cheddar. My! how pleased Lenny will be!"

The child looked up with a bright smile, then resumed his play.

"Dear heart," said Mrs. Bailey, "why do you choose Cheddar of all places? Is it because you first saw Mr. Maxwell there?"

A faint flush stole into the colourless cheeks. "Yes," she answered, gently.

"I wish you would forget him, and think of that noble Mr. Roswell."

"Oh, nurse! As if I could burden him or any man with my shame!" Leonie cried. "No, I will live always alone; it will not be for long."

She was suffering with heart affection, the doctor said, and must not have any mental worry. Oh, what a mockery it seemed to the girl—no mental worry! She knew herself the end was near, and but for Lenny would have been glad.

So they went to Cheddar, and for a few days Leonie was decidedly better. Then she began to droop, and Mrs. Bailey took the liberty to write to Aylmer begging him to go down, as she was very anxious about her young lady.

He instantly complied, and, reaching the quiet cottage where they had taken lodgings, was shown into the little sitting-room. Mrs. Bailey was sitting there, with Lenny on her knee. She greeted him warmly. He took the boy from her, and, after looking intently into his face, kissed him. Then he said,—

"Where is she?" and looked round the room.

"She was better this morning," and thought she would go up the cliffs."

"I will follow her. Is it judicious for her to do much climbing?"

"I'm afraid not, sir; but she seemed so to have set her mind upon it that I could not say her nay. You'll overtake her very easily."

He went out, and up the hill-side. There was a strange presentiment of ill upon him, which strive as he would, he could not shake off. He walked as swiftly as he could along the rocky, thorny way, rustling through the heather, and crushing the haresbells ruthlessly. And when he had almost reached the spot where, last year, he had found Leonie he saw her lying there, in almost the same attitude, and his heart stood still with fear.

Hardly breathing, he moved towards her, and kneeling down, tried to possess himself of one hand. It was clenched and cold. He spoke her name.

"Leonie, my darling. I have come to make you happy if you will let me."

No answer. Surely she must have fainted. He laid his hand upon her breast, then threw himself down beside her in a paroxysm of anguish, for she was dead!

There was no inquest. The doctor who had attended Leonie gave evidence as to the affection of the heart from which she suffered, but Aylmer set his teeth to suppress the groan which rose to his lips, for he knew she had been done to death by the two men who, each in his turn, had professed to love her.

Theodore was terribly shocked when he first heard the news, but when the early horror had passed away he acknowledged to himself that it was best for him and for her that she should die.

And being a man, in time he put her memory away from him, and returned to his old allegiance. Within a year of Leonie's death he married Irene Roswell.

Fergus Darrell yet lives a discontented, disappointed libertine; and twice a year Aylmer Roswell goes down to Cheddar, taking with him the bonny boy he has adopted, and for whose mother's sake he will live lonely all his life.

Lenny knows nothing yet of that sad story; he only knows that Uncle Aylmer had loved her first and last, and that all his life's love was laid low in the hour he found her cold and stiff on a hill-side.

[THE END.]

## THE SECRET OF THE MINE.

### CHAPTER LIX.

HAROLD TRAVERS had carried out his determination to follow the old man to the hospital, and after he had seen him well taken care of, he was about to leave the place, when the old man suddenly opened his eyes. The first object which they rested upon was a young man about to take his departure.

"Don't go!" he cried, stretching out his hands to him in a frenzy. "I have something to tell you. Promise me that you will stay and listen!"

After a moment's hesitation, Harold answered: "Certainly, I will stop if you desire it; but I hope you will be brief with whatever you have to say. My dear sir, my time is limited."

"I have something startling to unfold to you!" gasped the old man. "I am—I am—"

The sentence was not finished. Ere the old man could utter the words on his lips, he trailed off into unconsciousness again.

"Here's a pretty go!" exclaimed Harold, looking around him helplessly. "I have given this old party my word that I would stay here, and listen to the story that he has to tell; but he may not come out of this faint for two hours. I suppose, however, that I am in for it."

He seated himself dubiously in a chair near the cot, watching the poor old man with curious eyes. How long would he have to sit there? He wondered, gathering his brows together in a very impatient frown. Then he fell to ruminating over the curious interest which the old man had taken in the paper. Had that anything to do with his strange, unaccountable illness? Impossible!

There was certainly nothing in common between the inmates of Castle Royal and this poor old porter eking out a miserable existence by the sweat of his brow. No; that had nothing to do with his sickness, he felt quite sure.

At that same moment a cry of "Fire! fire!" resounded through the place. For an instant Harold was too dumfounded to think or act. He did not know anything of the entrances or exits.

In less time than it takes to tell it, the whole place was enveloped in flames. The greatest excitement reigned in the whole street. The cries of men, women, and children mingled with the roaring and crackling of flames. The fire was at its height when Harold's uncle turned into the avenue.

"I cannot get any further, sir," said the cabman. "There's a fire ahead; the whole street's blocked; and, by George! it looks like the hospital to which I'm to drive you. By George, sir, it is the hospital!"

The old gentleman put his head out of the window and stared as though he could not believe the evidence of his own senses.

"The police won't let us get any nearer, sir," said the man, drawing up to the curbstone.

"What shall I do in this case?"

"Stay here," he answered, hoarsely. "I will make my way on foot. If I do not come back in one hour's time, you may return to your stand."

Never in his whole life had the old gentleman been called to witness such a scene as he now gazed upon. The dead and dying were lying helplessly about, the firemen were doing their best lifting the disabled sufferers through the burning windows. Men, women, and children stood about shrieking with terror, calling upon the names of their loved ones who were in the burning building. The old gentleman looked with sickening horror on the flames that rose mountain high, and his heart sank within him.



"Harold!" he cried, hoarsely. "By Heaven I he cannot be saved!"

He would have given all his fortune to have saved the life of the bright young nephew he loved so well. He wrung his hands and tore his hair, hurrying from spot to spot, scarcely heeding the sight of time.

"Save my nephew, and I will make you a rich man!" he cried, to one of the stalwart firemen who was rushing by.

"Where is he? What ward is he in?" asked the man; but the old gentleman could not tell him; he did not know himself, and the fireman turned angrily away, muttering savagely something about people taking up his time at such a precious moment. Thrusting him aside as if he were a pauper instead of a millionaire, the fireman turned away heedless of his repeated calls.

"Harold!" he called, beating the air with his hands. "It is useless, useless! No one will save you! No one will heed me, not even for gold, precious gold!"

His voice was drowned out by the crackling of the flames, the hoarse rumbling of falling walls, the groans of the dying, and the pitiful shrieks of those who were there to claim their friends.

Noon came, the long hours of the afternoon sped quickly by, but the excitement did not abate. All in vain he searched hither and thither among those who had been removed from the hospital—his nephew was not among them.

"There is only one way to do, sir," said the policeman, touching his arm, "and that is to be patient like the rest of these people are; they are searching for their dead and dying as well as you. We are doing the best we can to get a list of those who have been saved and those who have perished. It cannot be accomplished much sooner than sundown. I would advise you to go to your home and come back."

Although it seemed like tearing out the very heart from his bosom and leaving it there to do this, yet he was obliged to do so. With the first tears in his eyes that had gathered there for many a year, he wended his way home sad and lonely.

It seemed to him that it must be all some terrible dream—the gay, handsome, stalwart nephew, from whom he had parted only a few short hours before in such bitter anger, lying dead beneath a pile of ruins.

It seemed too horrible for him to realise. He told himself that it was some awful dream, from which he should awake presently.

He lived alone in a grand old house—alone save for the servants in the house, which he had intended should some day belong to Harold.

They looked in vague alarm to see him return from business at that unusual hour.

The old millionaire was as steady as clock-work in his habits.

He breakfasted in the morning at eight, left the house at nine o'clock for his office. Indeed, the neighbours across the way could tell that it was nine to a minute when they saw the front door open in the morning and the old gentleman issue forth. He dined at one, and returned to his home at half-past four, winter or summer, rain or shine.

No wonder it created a great excitement among the servants when he rushed into the house at half-past three, ringing the bell hastily to summon the servant. His hands trembled too violently to use his latch-key.

He rushed into the grand entrance hall, his face white as death.

"Oh, sir," cried the butler, with the familiarity of an old servant, "what can be the matter? Your face is as pale as it will be in death."

He never remembered afterwards how he had explained what had happened; but by degrees the truth of what had occurred came to him—poor Master Harold was indeed gone!

"Oh, sir, I cannot believe it. He left the house but a little while since as buoyant and hardy as a young fellow as one would care to see. He cannot be dead! There is some awful mistake; I feel quite sure of it. Take a glass of wine, sir, and lie down in your room, and let me see to it."

As though he were a little child, he let the man

conduct him to his chamber, and to quietly assist him to his couch: for the scene which he had gone through had been a terrible one to him.

If he had but known then that his nephew had been saved, and of the amazing story he was listening to at that moment, a second shock would have been spared him.

At the very instant that the cry of "Fire!" resounded through the building, Harold had started from his seat. Although he was young and strong, and stout of heart, he could not help but observe that the outer ward was wrapped in a sheet of flames that would make even the stoutest man quail.

He heard the cries of the sick, the screams of the attendants ringing in his ears. They broke the spell of horror which bound him to the spot.

He rushed frantically towards what he supposed was the nearest exit.

Then, with a thrill of horror, he remembered the old man. In the excitement of the moment he had entirely forgotten him. He stopped short. The man was a pauper, and old, and ill; but life was surely as sweet to him as to the mightiest king on the throne. And he had left him to die!

A flash of shame rose to his bearded cheeks. Like a flash he wheeled about. He would not leave him to die; he would save him if it was within his power.

As he re-entered the room through the blinding smoke, he could see the white, emaciated face lying against the no less white pillow.

He caught the old man up in his strong arms, counterpane and all, which he wrapped hastily about his head, and rushed with his burden through the blinding smoke and the terrific heat.

Harold Travers never knew how he accomplished it, but he found himself staggering through the terrible fire and the smoke, firmly clutching his burden.

For a moment it seemed to him that the very air he breathed was aflame. The excitement was so great, with people being carried to and fro, that no one observed the smoke-begrimed young man with his heavy load.

He made his way to the opposite pavement, where there was a fruit shop, and asked to be permitted to carry the old man within, a request that was most readily granted.

"I was a physician years ago in my own country," said the vendor. "I am sure that I can help the man."

"Perhaps you can," answered Harold. "It would certainly be a deed of mercy, for I doubt if he has anyone in the world who cares for him."

The old Italian shook his head and went to work with a will over the unconscious man.

Harold was about to return to offer his aid to the unfortunate hospital people, but the Italian held him back.

"You are neither a policeman nor a fireman; they will not let you enter the building, my friend. You are more overcome than you may realise."

Again Harold felt constrained to take the kindly advice. He realised that the smoke had entered his lungs, and he was more faint than he had at first thought. Then, again, he had promised to be at the old man's bedside when he regained consciousness. Harold was not one to renounce a promise lightly. There was nothing for it but to wait.

The Italian bent over the sufferer, muttering some startled words in his own tongue which Harold did not understand. Then he said in broken English,—

"I have seen the face of your friend before. Was he ever in America—in the far West, I mean?"

"I cannot tell you, I am sure. I never saw him before to-day."

## CHAPTER LX.

As hour passed, and still another. The old man whom Harold Travers had taken to the fruit-seller lay tossing on his coarse pillow, babbling empty nothings, or, at least, they seemed so to the stalwart, handsome young fellow looking regretfully at the pile of smouldering buildings

across the way, and the molley throng which kept surging to and fro.

But those rambling words produced quite a different effect upon the wrinkled and brown little Italian, who stood bending over him with bated breath, listening intently to those disjointed sentences.

Harold's attention was drawn to him by hearing his teeth chatter. To his surprise, he saw that the man had turned the colour of parchment.

"You look very ill, my dear friend," he remarked.

To his intense astonishment, the little Italian suddenly sprang to his side and caught his hand.

"Tell me, do the dead ever come back?" he cried. "Do they ever come into the flesh again and stalk abroad upon the earth until they meet their murderers—that is, if they were murdered?"

"Is that what the poor fellow over there is rambling about, my good doctor?"

The little Italian was not to be appeased. "You do not answer my question."

"Because it appears to be such an absurd one," laughed the young man. "In your country, sunny Italy, the ghosts and goblins may saunter forth after midnight with their mandolins or tinkling cymbals to delight a fair senorita's ear; but in this country we are too busy, lead too busy a life of it. We are glad enough to lie down and rest after we have shaken off this mortal coil. We don't come back to see whether the other fellow has married our wife or sweetheart, as the case may be."

"I am in no mood for jesting, sir," returned the Italian, fiercely. "I ask of you a most serious question, and you scoff at me. Do the dead come back?"

"Seriously speaking," returned the young man, "I should say not. But why do you ask me this?"

"Because," cried the Italian, in a shrill voice, "I saw the man who is lying yonder—die!"

The words did not startle the young Englishman as the Italian had imagined they would. He merely threw back his head, saying, carelessly,—

"As far as I can see, the poor old fellow hasn't passed away yet."

"I say you jest!" cried the Italian. "I saw him die!"

"Did, eh?" exclaimed Harold, with the utmost sangfroid.

"Yes!" exclaimed the man, fairly shaking with fright. "He has changed, but the moment I looked squarely into his face, I saw it was him. He has grown older; it is little more than a year; but he looks as though ages had passed over him."

Harold looked at the little Italian doctor, or fruit-seller, whichever he chose to call himself, thinking that he was a little cracked in the upper story. He had little vagaries of his own. Perhaps it would be better not to cross him in his notions.

"You saw him die, eh? Well, how was that?" he asked, in a pure spirit of mischief.

To his surprise, he received an answer.

"Almost a year ago. Let me tell you about it. Somehow the memory of it has haunted me ever since. Why do you laugh?" he cried angrily.

"Is it not a little ludicrous to hear of the death, over a year ago, of a man who is still alive?"

The little Italian looked at him doubtfully.

"I do not know how to take you Englishmen," he said. "You laugh when we Italians would be surprised, and look it. You are not even curious, while we would be most excited."

"Probably," returned Harold; "but then we are very cold-blooded, while you of Italy are impetuous—willing to see everything through blood-red spectacles, as it were."

"But I repeat that I saw that man die over a year ago," reasserted the little doctor, in a terrified voice.

"THE HUMAN HAIR: Its Restoration and Preservation." A Practical Treatise on Baldness, Greyness, Superfluous Hair, &c. 40 pages. Post-free six stamps, from Dr. Hous, Hair Specialist, Bournemouth.

"Perhaps he can tell you, when you bring him to, how he managed it," suggested Harold, humorously.

"I had no hand in it!" cried the doctor. "I did not murder him!"

"You doctors never do," observed Harold, dryly; adding, "No doubt you were called in to render professional service."

His companion looked at him doubtfully.

"No," he responded. "I told you that I have not practised in this country. I thought to make money easier when I came over here; that gold and silver were to be picked up in the streets; but they weren't. I drifted to the wilds of America."

"Ah! then you came direct to England?" laughed Harold.

Without heeding this interruption, the Italian went on, in his quick, voluble manner.

"He was very rich, and I was so poor, pouf!—there were days at a time when I did not get a good meal. It was then that they were rowing down stream in a boat one day, when—"

A moan of pain from the sufferer on the hard lounge cut short the words.

"Don't kill me, for the love of Heaven!" cried the sick man. "Take what I have about me! There's a great sum of money in my inner pocket, and most valuable jewels on my person. Take them. Surely that is all you can want of me!"

The Italian doctor looked petrified. His tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth, and he turned ashen white.

The sick man opened his eyes and sat upright, staring around him with astonished eyes.

The Italian doctor tried to fly, but a nameless power, which he could not resist, seemed to hold him fairly rooted to the spot.

He caught at a ring he wore on the little finger of his left hand, tried to slip it off, and falling in this, to turn it underneath.

It was then that Harold noticed what had failed to attract his attention before—that this Italian who was passing himself off as a doctor wore a peculiarly odd and extremely costly ring. He was not an observing young fellow, and this was probably the reason that he had not noticed it before. Now he saw it was a very brilliant diamond in a most unique setting.

He started, and for the first time the bantering, humorous smile left his lips.

What could this mean? How came this humble, unpretentious fruit-seller, or unknown doctor, to come into possession of a ring like that?

He did not have an opportunity to give the matter a second thought, for just then he was startled by the entrance of one of the servants of his uncle's household.

Before he could utter a single remark, the man cried out excitedly,—

"Oh, Master Harold, here you are, alive and well! I told your uncle you weren't in that dreadful hospital fire; but he would not listen to me."

"In the hospital fire?" he asked in amazement. "Why what put such a thought as that into your head?"

"Why, the telephone message that you yourself sent, sir, that you were going to the hospital."

The young man burst into a laugh which the dignified, grave old servant did not share.

"I told the old gentleman that it was no doubt one of your practical jokes; but he would not have it so, sir."

"Why, good gracious!" cried the young man, growing instantly sober, "surely the old gentleman did not understand me to say that I was going to the hospital because I was ill, or disabled, or anything of that sort?"

"To be sure, Mr. Harold," returned the man, gravely. "What else could he think?"

"Why, good gracious! what a blockhead, what a stupid I am!" cried the young man.

"The old gentleman has been in serious trouble over it," continued the man. "In fact, sir, he became so ill while searching for your remains, that he was obliged to come home."

"Good gracious! you astounded me!" cried Harold turning very pale. "I saw this old

man"—pointing to the recumbent figure on the couch—"fall ill in the street to-day. The fancy seized me to have him taken to a hospital. I accompanied him there. And just as I had seen the old man, who is a stranger to me, safely disposed of, and was about to turn away, the fire broke out. I rescued him, and had him taken over here."

"That is how I happened to discover you, sir. I was sent by your uncle to look over the remains, and identify you if possible. Your uncle is on his way to join me by this time. I heard of one man being brought over here. I came in to ask to be allowed to see the remains of the dead or dying, whichever it might be, and lo! here I find you, alive and well!"

"I will go to my uncle at once," cried Harold Travers.

"You would not find him home. As I said, sir, he is driving here in his brougham. How he will rejoice to see you, to be sure, sir!" And the honest old servant's eyes lighted up with tears at the thought. "He was to stop at police headquarters across the way. I can see him from here, and can easily call to the coachman to come across; but I can assure you, sir, it will be a shock to see you alive, and a pleasant shock upsets one at times almost as badly as a sad one."

Turning, he saw the eyes of the poor old man whose life he had just saved bent upon him intently.

"It all comes back to me," he said in a strangely altered voice. "The pictures you were showing me in the paper, and the startling story I was striving to tell you when unconsciousness overcame me, paralysing my senses, tying my tongue. Will you listen to my story, young man?"

"Yes," replied Harold, drawing up his chair, cheerily.

"Here is your uncle's carriage, sir," said the servant. "Someone has directed him here."

## CHAPTER LXI.

THE old man lying upon the couch paid no heed to the words.

"Listen!" he cried. "Hear me, while I have strength to speak." He reached over and grasped the young man's hand in a terrible grip. "You must heed what I have to say," he cried. "I am about to tell you that which will stirle you. Out of chaos my mind has come. For long days and months I have tried to think. I have been in a terrible stupor. I am Wilfrid Stanford!"

The effect of his words literally shocked the old man for an instant.

Harold Travers thought the old man had suddenly gone mad.

Wilfrid Stanford saw the look on his companion's face, and sunk back with a heart-broken sigh.

"Let me tell you my story now," he cried. "It all comes back to me most vividly—stepping into my carriage, taking the reins with that scoundrel Maurice Fairfax sitting beside me, and driving down the road. In an unguarded moment that fiend incarnate, whom I had forbidden to sue for my daughter's hand—for he had just asked permission of me to do so—that fiend incarnate, by a diabolical move, snatched the reins from my hand, and caused the mettlesome horses to run away and throw me out."

"I was stunned, lying there practically helpless. In a moment Fairfax was bending over me; in the next he had lifted me bodily and threw me over the edge of the precipice."

"Oh, Heaven! what I suffered in that horrible instant of time that seemed longer to me than eternity! I felt myself going down, down! I realised what my fate would be. I would strike the rocks, and in an instant of time would certainly be dashed to death."

"Instead, I fell into a boat which three men were rowing. I heard the exclamations of surprise which broke from their lips, not unmingled with curses, at being thus almost upset in that most dangerous of all rivers. They were about to cast me overboard, when they observed that I wore fine jewelry, and thought it would be

best to secure that, as well as any money I might chance to have in my pockets. I lay there, dying, as I thought, unable to move hand or foot, or even to make a moan. They went through my pockets, thus discovering who I was. Then there was a consultation as to whether they should hold my body for a reward. After much controversy, they concluded that this course would not be best. They took me a long distance and threw me down I knew not where."

"How long I lay thus dazed, I can only conjecture. The tingling of life crept through my body. With great difficulty I raised myself to my feet."

"Where was I? Who was I? I could not answer."

"Then somebody appeared, and I was hauled up on the deck of a ship, and I felt a draught of pure air across my face. The sunlight seemed to dazzle me. The captain stepped up to me."

"Who are you, and where are you going?" he asked, sharply.

"I tried to answer him, but words would not come to me. I actually did not know who I was. He touched his hand significantly to his forehead, then looked at me, and one of the officers nodded."

"He is not quite right," said the captain; "there is little or no use in questioning him."

"To this the other seemed to agree. I shall never forget that night which I passed under the stars, and the nights which followed it. I seemed to begin a new life—a life which had neither aim nor purpose. The past was a blank to me. I rose each morning, worked hard at whatever I could get to do, and lay down at night to dreamless sleep."

"On reaching land the captain found me a place as porter in a large wholesale warehouse, there I have been ever since. There I would have been until death had surely relieved me, if you, young man, had not entered the place with that paper, which by chance fell from your pocket. I saw it, and something seemed to break in my brain, and to clear it at the first glance of my daughter's picture."

"In a moment the past came back to me, bringing all to my mind as though it had occurred but yesterday. I saw it all; they had looked upon me as dead—as drowned in the terrible, rushing river. My daughter, Pauline, had been cheated out of her inheritance, and Maurice Fairfax, the villain, had terrified her into marrying him. Oh, Heaven, if I had but wings!" cried the old man, excitedly, "send for some one—call for some one to identify me."

Harold's uncle had entered the place, and stood motionless, first with the shock of seeing his beloved nephew before him alive and well; then, when he had recovered from that, of beholding Wilfrid Stanford, who was like one risen from the dead, standing before him. The recognition was mutual, although to his horror, the man whom he had known but one year before as middle-aged and handsome, was now white-haired and feeble, as though years had passed over him in that time.

"For the love of Heaven, is it really you, Stanford?" he cried, advancing.

A cry from the little Italian doctor arrested his attention.

"I see that the game is up!" he cried in a frenzy. "When one comes to life to face his murderer, then there is no place to hide in the great wide world. I throw myself upon your mercy. It was I who took the diamonds from you, and sent you on board the vessel. I give myself up—I plead for mercy. Here is your ring. In a little tin-box on yonder shelf are some of the papers I took from you on that day. Have mercy, about, spirit, or whatever you are!"

The man fled from his place, a shrieking maniac, while a bystander, who had been attracted by the unusual noise, and who had also heard all, ran after him.

"This is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard of," cried both Harold and his uncle in one breath.

**CHRONIC INDIGESTION** and its attendant Misery and Suffering Cured with Tonic "Doctor" (purely vegetable), 2/6, from Chemists; 3/-, post free from Dr. Hous, "Glendower," Bournemouth. Sample bottle and pamphlet, with Analytical Reports, 2s., 6 stamps.



"My carriage is at the door. Come with me at once to my house," said the man, "and we will talk this matter over. Harold and I will advise with you as to what is best to be done in this matter."

"My daughter, Pauline, has disappeared, and my great wealth has been squandered by that villain!" he cried, raising his hands to heaven.

They could scarcely pacify him when they told him of the rumour that Maurice Fairfax was dead—killed in a railway accident.

"It may be," he responded, shaking his head; "but my experience has taught me never to believe that a man is dead until I have had absolute proof of it."

How little he believed what a prophecy there was in the words he uttered—how soon the words would strike home to the hearts of those who heard them! The thoughts of his great wealth having dwindled away to almost nothing was little to Wilfrid Stanford compared with the knowledge of Pauline's disappearance.

"That fiend incarnate has made away with her!" he cried, shaking as with palsy.

They did not know how to comfort him, his grief was so intense.

"I must take the first boat for America!" he cried: "I cannot get there quick enough!"

When Harold Travers signified his intention of accompanying him, he was grateful beyond words.

"There is but one thing which deters me from starting this very day with you," replied Harold Travers, "and that is, I have a friend in a little trouble who has just sent for me. His trial comes up to-morrow. He will be discharged, or it will go hard with him."

"It will take Mr. Stanford another day to gain strength enough to travel," said his uncle.

"How strange fate is!" thought the young man. "My sympathy for Mr. Stanford is great. No one would rejoice more than me to see him resume his place in the world. And yet I am going to warn my friend Denis Connor not to marry his daughter Pauline, even though he should find her, and reveal to him a certain secret in the history of the Stanfords which the outside world never guessed."

While Harold Travers was ruminating over this matter a telegram was handed to him. He opened it quickly. There were but few words, which read as follows,—

"Can I see you at once on a matter of life or death?" (Signed) BERTIE HOWARD."

It so happened that Harold's uncle was president of the bank in which young Howard was employed. In this way he had happened to form his acquaintance. Between the young men a strong friendship had sprung up, which the uncle had taken vigorous steps to suppress when young Howard's downfall occurred. And when Bertie went from bad to worse he kept out of Harold's way. It was only by the merest chance, just as he was about to start for America, that he had learned of Bertie's latest mishap. He had delayed his trip to find out what it was all about. Was it fate that had caused him to stop over? Otherwise he would not have been the instrument of Providence in bringing back the reason of Wilfrid Stanford.

He responded to the telegram without delay, feeling that his friend was in a more desperate straits than he had ever expected.

(To be continued.)

The Escorial Palace in Spain contains a cathedral, a monastery with 200 cells, two colleges, three chapter houses, three libraries, and nearly 8,000 other rooms. It is lighted by 1,100 oyster and 1,700 inner windows, and has been fitly termed the eighth wonder of the world.

An apparatus for burning coal-dust has been brought out in Germany. The consumption of even the most inferior class of coal-dust is attended with no smoke, while the heat produced is so intense that the apparatus has been adapted in Berlin to smelting works, and with excellent results.

## FACETIE.

"HAVE you seen those noiseless baby carriages yet?" "No. What I want is a noiseless baby."

MRS KLONDIKE: "Why are you leaving, Bridget? Something private?" "No, mum; sergeant."

DOCTOR: "I am quite sure I can cure you." Patient: "How long will it take?" "How much money have you?"

"DOB says I grow more beautiful every time he sees me," said Mary. "Why don't you ask him to call oftener?" said Anne.

"CHARLIE, your father is calling you." Charlie: "Yes, I hear him. But he is calling 'Charlie.' I don't need to go until he yells 'Charles.'"

MRS PATTERSON: "I'm very sorry to learn that you've been ill. Had you to keep your bed?" Workless Willie: "No, mum. I had to sell it."

DR SAPPY: "When I was a child I had a fall that knocked me senseless." Miss Pert: "I suppose it is too late now to do anything about it."

LADY (during dance): "Good gracious! I have lost my hairpins, and now my hair is going to fall down over my shoulders!" Partner: "Never mind; I shall be glad to pick it up for you."

"My wife's health is excellent now." "What has cured her?" "I told her I would allow her so much a month to pay her doctor's bill and buy her gowns. She is now dodging the doctor all right."

WIFE: "John, dear, if it should be my misfortune to die before you, do you think you would marry again?" Husband: "Well, I dunno, my love. Until it comes to him, no man can tell how he would be able to stand prosperity."

THE following doubtful compliment is a fragment from a love letter: "How I wish, my darling Adelaide, my engagements would permit me to leave town and come and see you! It would be like visiting some old ruin, hallowed by time and fraught with a thousand recollections."

ARTIST (triumphantly): "What do you think of my picture of a peasant girl, Miss Feather-brain?" Miss Featherbrain (guilefully): "Just splendid! What a lovely hat she has on? Is she going to the theatre?" Artist (despondingly): "That's not a hat; she's carrying home hay."

MR. MANN: "Did you see that woman just as we crossed over?" Mrs. Mann: "You mean the woman in the camel's hair gown and beaver jacket; the one who had on bronze shoes, a hat trimmed with fuchsias and heliotrope, with pink ribbons and a chiffon veil? No, I didn't notice her in particular. What were you going to say about her?"

## EPPS'S COCOA

Possesses the following Distinctive Merits:

**DELICACY OF FLAVOUR. SUPERIORITY in QUALITY.**

**GRATEFUL and COMFORTING to the NERVOUS or DYSPEPTIC. NUTRITIVE QUALITIES UNRIVALLED.** Sold in 4-lb. & 1-lb. Packets, & 1-lb. Tins.

JAMES EPPS & CO., Ltd., Homoeopathic Chemists, London.

## EPPS'S COCOA

## TOOTH-ACHE

CURED INSTANTLY BY

**BUNTER'S NERVINE** Prevents Decay, Saves Extractions, Relieves Neuralgic Headaches and all Nervous Affections. BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 1/6.

## TOWLE'S PENNYROYAL PILLS FOR FEMALES.

QUICKLY CORRECT ALL IRREGULARITIES, REMOVE ALL OBSTRUCTIONS, and relieve the distressing symptoms so prevalent with the sex. Boxes, 1/4 & 2/6 (contains three times the quantity), of all Chemists. Sent anywhere on receipt of 15 or 24 stamps, by E. T. TOWLE & Co., Manufacturers, Dryden St., Nottingham.

## "DRUNKENNESS"

CURED. A lady having cured her husband severely of intemperate habits will gladly send particulars of the remedy to any correspondent. Write privately Mrs. L. E. BARNISTON, 4, Featherstone Buildings, London, W.C. Powders are useless.

**£20** TOBACCONISTS COMMENCING. See Ill. Guide (250 pages), 8d. How to open a Cigar Store, £20 to £200. TOBACCONISTS' OUTFITTING CO., 156, Euston Road, London. The largest and original house (50 years' reputation). Manager, H. MYERS. Hairdressers. Stated up. Estimates free.

## LADIES' APIOL AND STEEL PILLS.

A FRENCH REMEDY FOR ALL IRREGULARITIES. Superseding Pennyroyal, Bitter Apple, and Pill Cochine. Price 4s. 6d. post-free. Obtainable only from MARTIN, Pharmaceutical Chemist, Southampton.

## DOES YOUR HEAD ACHE?

"KAPUTINE" cures instantly.

Enclose stamped addressed envelope to "K." KAPUTINE, LTD., HUDDERSFIELD, for free sample, with name of nearest agent.

## PEARL COATED AND TASTELESS.

ARE THE BEST IN THE WORLD.

Composed of Steel, Pennyroyal, Bitter Apple, Aloes, Pilcochia, and other Drugs known only to Dr. Brown.

**DR. BROWN'S FAMOUS FEMALE PILLS**

1/4, 2/6 & 5/6.

SENT FREE FROM OBSERVATION.

Have no equal.

ADDRESS:

INSTITUTE, SHOREDITCH, LONDON, N.E.

AVOID DISHONEST IMITATIONS.



## 4/- SEWING MACHINE 4/-

Patented No. 45137.

THIS Machine does work which will bear comparison with that of other machines costing higher prices. Entirely made of metal, with steel and plated fittings. It works at great speed. It has no complication like other machines, therefore does not require to be learnt. No winding of bobbins. No trouble. No teaching. No experience; and is everywhere superseding the old-fashioned troublesome machines. It works fine or coarse materials equally as well. Sent Carriage Paid for 4s. 6d.; two for 8s. 6d. Extra Needles, 6d. and 1s. per packet. Write for Press Opinions and Testimonials, or call and see the Machines at work. Address—

**SEWING MACHINE CO.,**

34 DEPT., 31, BROOKE STREET, HOLBORN, LONDON, E.C.

## SOCIETY.

THE Empress Frederick will reside in Berlin for several weeks in her palace Unter den Linden. Next month her Majesty will visit the Queen at Osborne.

On board the *Victoria and Albert* there are portraits of every captain who has commanded the Royal yacht during the Queen's reign. It is in the saloon that these photographs are—handsomely framed—hung.

THE Queen is greatly interested in the engagement of this her Majesty's eldest great grandchild. It is understood that Princess Frederica is to go to Osborne during the Empress Frederick's stay there, and that her fiancé, Prince Henry the Thirtieth of Reuss, is also to visit his fiancée's august great grandmamma sometime in February.

THE Prince of Wales has invited the Houghton miner, whose pick he used on visiting a mine forty years ago, for a short stay at Sandringham.

LI HUNG CHANG's visit to England is said to have had the most beneficial effect on the destinies of women in China. Since his return he has appointed the first Chinese lady practising medicine in his own land to be physician to the women of his household.

AFTER the death of the Duchess of Cambridge her cottage at Kew reverted to the Crown, and the Queen then granted the place to the Duke of Cambridge for his life, and of late he has lived there a great deal during the summer. It is said that the Duke will probably lend Cambridge Cottage, with the full approval of the Queen, to the Duke of Teck, who cannot afford to keep up the White Lodge, which is to be granted, to the Duke and Duchess of York.

HIS successful appeal on behalf of the very poor at the time of the Jubilee celebration has determined the Princess of Wales to take active steps towards securing for the poor during the very cold weather that will come upon us presently some measure of relief. Her Royal Highness is most anxious that soup kitchens should be established in all the very poor districts of the metropolis, and that, if possible, there shall be warm food at least twice a week for all the destitute who apply for it.

THE Duke and Duchess of Sparta are to be absent from Greece for a year. Prince Constantine is suffering severely from nervous depression, and he is in great need of rest and change, while the Princess Sophia has also been out of health for some time past. The Duke and Duchess will go from Athens to Naples, and afterwards to the Riviera. In May they are to pay a long visit to the Empress Frederick at Cronberg, after which they will come to England for a short time, and the months of August and September are to be spent in Denmark. There has been no communication whatever between the Emperor William and the Duchess of Sparta (formerly his favourite sister) for a very long time. The Emperor has never forgiven the "conversion" of Princess Sophia to the Greek Orthodox Church, although both the Queen and the Empress Frederick have repeatedly endeavoured to restore friendly relations between them.

THE Queen and Court will reside at Osborne, for nearly three months. The Queen loves Osborne, which was a favourite residence with Prince Albert. His Royal Highness, indeed, drew the plans for many of the improvements which make the place so fine, and the eight-mile drive in the estate, which the Queen loves, was all laid out by the Prince with a view to giving Her Majesty pleasure. The Queen's courier (Mr. Doss) has been in Nice making arrangements for her Majesty's stay there next spring. Her Majesty will occupy the same suite of apartments that she had last year; but certain further arrangements are being planned to secure the Sovereign's greater comfort. Her Majesty's medical advisers are said to be greatly in favour of this annual change of air and scene and comparative rest for the Queen.

## STATISTICS.

IN London there are more fires on Saturday than on any other day in the week.

IT is supposed that there are at least 17,000,000 comets in the solar system.

THERE are 106 boys born to every 100 girls, but more boys die in infancy than girls.

IT is estimated that every square mile of the sea contains one hundred and twenty million fishes.

THE amount of champagne consumed on Christmas Day is reckoned to be three times as much as on any other day of the year.

DURING 1896 this country consumed 127,418,216 pounds of currants, a good portion of which went into the making of plum puddings.

## GEMS.

WORK touches the key of endless activities, opens the infinite, and stands awestruck before the immensity of what there is to do.

OBSTACLES which seem to hinder our course afford the best opportunities for developing the courage and accumulating the power which we need to pursue it.

HOW mankind defers from day to day the best it can do and the most beautiful things it can enjoy, without thinking that every day may be the last one, and that lost time is lost eternally!

THE needful thing is not that we abstain, but that we consecrate, the interests and affections of our life, entertain them with a thoughtful heart, serve them with the will of duty, and reverse them as the benediction of God.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

**ORANGE SHORT CAKE.**—Make a light blancet dough and bake it in a pie-dish. Take out and split as soon as cool. Cover the layers with sliced oranges, sprinkled with sugar, and serve with cream.

**DELICIOUS PUFF PASTRY.**—Take half a cup each of butter and lard and chop into this four cups of prepared flour (flour into which four small teaspoonsful of baking powder have been sifted). Add half a teaspoonful of salt, and mix with enough milk to roll dough out easily. Do not have the dough hard. Handle as little as possible.

**APPLE CUSTARD PUDDING.**—Put a quart of pared and quartered apples in a stew-pan, with half a cup of water, and cook them until they are soft. Remove from the fire and add half a cup of sugar, two tablespoonfuls of butter, and the grated rind and the juice of a lemon. Having ready mixed two cups of breadcrumbs and two tablespoonfuls of flour; add this also to the apple mixture, after which stir in two well-beaten eggs. Turn all into a well-buttered pudding dish, and bake forty-five minutes in a moderate oven.

**LADY FINGERS.**—One pound granulated sugar, fourteen eggs, and four ounces and a half of fine flour, four ounces and a half of potato flour. Separate the whites and yolks of the eggs, setting them on the fire in shallow dishes until perfectly cold, then beat to a froth; adding a little salt and a small amount of flavouring, whatever might be preferred. Beat the sugar and the yolks of the eggs until smooth, then slowly add the other ingredients, putting in the whites of the eggs last of all. The success of this cake depends largely on the mixing, which must be quickly done. Fold a sheet of buttered paper on straight lines, place this on a baking-pan, then, with a small dropper made for this purpose, press the batter out upon the paper sheets in the required form.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE field of Waterloo is covered with a crop of crimson poppies every year.

OBSERVATIONS have shown that short-sightedness is far more common with light than with dark eyes.

TWO electricians at Gratz, Austria, claim to have invented an arrangement by which a newspaper can be printed by telegraph in any number of places at the same time.

IN feudal times the bear's-head was the distinguishing Christmas dish. It was served on a gold or silver dish, and brought in to a flourish of trumpets.

THE Japanese are fond of bathing. In the city of Tokio there are 800 public bath-houses, in which a person can take a bath, hot or cold, for a sum equal to a halfpenny.

THERE is a stone still existing in St. Swithin's Church, London, which is supposed to be the centre milestone from which the Romans measured distance when in Britain.

THE eagle is able to look at the sun without blinking, by means of a thin, semi-transparent veil, which the bird can draw instantaneously over its eye. It does not obstruct the sight.

WHILE wild geese are on the wing they are talkative and noisy; but when they alight to feed, as they do generally at night, they are so quiet that one may pass within a few yards of 100 of them, and never notice their presence.

JAPANESE auctions are silent. Each bidder writes his name and bid upon a slip of paper, which he places in a box. The box is opened by the auctioneer, and the goods declared the property of the highest bidder.

THE yew was formerly much grown in English churchyards, and furnished the best material for the bows used by archers before guns came into use. The yew tree is noted for attaining great age, and also for the extreme hardness of its wood.

A MACHINE has been invented, which is composed of exquisitely graduated wheels rubbing a tiny diamond point at the end of an almost equally tiny arm, whereby one is able to write upon glass the whole of the Lord's Prayer within a space which measures the two hundred and ninety-fourth part of an inch in length by the four hundred and fortieth part of an inch in breadth, or about the measurement of the dot over the letter "i" in common print. With this machine any one who understood operating it could write the whole 8,667,490 letters of the Bible eight times over the space of an inch—a square inch. A specimen of this marvellous microscopic writing was enlarged by photography, and every letter and point was perfect and could be read with ease.

SUPERFICIAL observation has defined fear as that characteristic of living creatures which teaches them to avoid danger and thereby protect themselves from injury or death. But if our study of nature is exhaustive we shall find that fear does not protect limb or life. Indeed, nature has furnished one class of living organisms strictly as the prey of another. There are multitudes of creatures that feed upon other forms of animal life and rarely indulge in a vegetable diet. In a state of nature these animals and insects hunt their prey. It is, therefore, a logical inference that if fear were given as a protection to life many of these living things would be without the means of subsistence. A number of scientists, prominent among whom was Darwin, have given profound study to the psychogenesis of fear and found that it has only a most imperfect relation to the self-preservation of the creature that experiences it. It is supposed that the attitude of kneeling, which is the posture associated with supplication and terror, originally came from the inability of the muscles of the legs to support the weight, thereby causing the individual to sink to the ground. Dogs crouch and whine when frightened and horses become so tremulous that their legs can scarcely sustain them.



## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**T. L.**—She had better make a will.  
**L. A.**—It can be obtained of any newsreader.  
**HALPER.**—You should consult a good grammar.  
**BOB.**—It may be obtained of any good newsagent.  
**PAUL.**—We neither give addresses nor reply by post.  
**S. S.**—The twentieth century begins on January 1st, 1901.  
**HEUTE.**—Anemone should not be used on oxidized silver articles.  
**KERNEY.**—It can be obtained of any Parliamentary publisher.  
**OSBORNE.**—Marriage with a deceased wife's sister is not legal.  
**LOVELL.**—The Duke of York would then become Prince of Wales.  
**ALFRED.**—The best course would be to write to his commanding officer.  
**EMMA.**—The hide of the hippopotamus, in some parts, is two inches thick.  
**PURCELL.**—Dudley Castle is in Staffordshire; Dudley town is in Worcestershire.  
**ROSE.**—Flour paste should be withdrawn when it comes to the boiling point.  
**WORMLEY.**—They always lose flesh when suffering from the disease you mention.  
**P. M.**—There is no legal obligation upon the mistress to give her servant a character.  
**G. B.**—Waterproofing of rubber can be made only with expensive and expensive machinery.  
**FARRINGTON.**—Toujours sometimes last two hundred years before they entirely melt away.  
**V. R.**—You must apply to Registrar-General of British Seamen, Custom House, London, E.C.  
**CONSTANT BASHAM.**—You must give the servant a month's notice, or a month's wages in lieu of it.  
**INTERESTED.**—Zoologists say that all known species of wild animals are gradually diminishing in size.  
**H. H.**—If the wife dies childless and without making a will, her husband takes all the personal property.  
**DURHAM.**—A case like yours requires well-devised medical treatment; it will not yield to anything short of that.  
**OLANA.**—Make a weak solution of isinglass; draw it through that, and when evenly wetted all over, hang to dry.  
**RICHARD.**—The executor must pay the debts owing by the deceased as soon as possible. There is no precise limit of time.  
**ARTHUR.**—The largest fresh-water lake in Europe is Ladoga, in North-Western Russia, which has an area of seven thousand square miles.  
**PETER.**—The boy's parents are not liable for the window broken by him; but the boy can be summoned before the magistrates and fined.  
**DOUGLASS.**—You have no right to sell a straying animal. It ought to have been taken to the public pound, or placed in the charge of the police.  
**LEO.**—A little kerosene put on the dust cloth will brighten your furniture wonderfully, and prevent the dust from flying from one place to the other.  
**MARK.**—Glass monuments and tombstones have been made merely as experiments. There is probably no place where they may be found ready for use.  
**JENKINS.**—When a prisoner resolutely refuses to plead either guilty or not guilty, his silence is accepted as a plea of not guilty, and the trial proceeds.  
**B. L.**—We can only recommend you to have new letters put on, as any effectual cleansing process would ruin the old ones.  
**O. MINORA SAE.**—A goldfish will die in ninety minutes if placed in water which contains one per cent. of alcohol. In water which contains twenty per cent. of alcohol it will die instantly.  
**B. K.**—To bore a hole half-way through the sole of a shoe is said to prevent its squeaking. The reason assigned for the cure is that the air between the layers of leather is released by the boring.  
**M. R.**—There is no certain method of removing tattoo marks from skin; it is said that going over the marks with a needle and cream brings up the ink, but we have no personal knowledge of the efficacy of the plan.  
**NELSON.**—You would not place your cake on your afternoon tea service. You would have your cake in your saucer or in a tiny plate, and you would put your service on your knee to catch the crumbs.  
**D. C.**—All you seek to accomplish can be got by washing the head with water containing a little borax, or making a pomade of three ounces glycerine with one ounce powdered borax, applying to hair at night and washing off in the morning.  
**A. K.**—It would appear that the young couple ought to have something to say about the matter, as they are the parties most nearly concerned. Why not agree to let the attachment stand as it is for the present and see if the couple do not get over their opposition.

**WORRIED MARY.**—Washing the head occasionally with water containing a little borax renders it soft and glossy.

**BIBBY.**—Dissolve a little pipeclay in the water employed in washing linen; it cleans the dirtiest linen thoroughly with one-half the labour, and saves a good deal of soap. By this method the clothes are improved in colour just as if they were bleached.

**UNHAPPY BOB.**—The very plainest men are often the pleasantest, for the simple reason that they know there is nothing in their looks to be vain about, and therefore strive to make themselves acceptable by simple courtesy to all with whom they come in contact.

**PAUL.**—The cure for blushing consists in an effort to maintain your presence of mind, and to reflect and reason on the cause of excitement which produces it, instead of sinking into a temporary state of mental imbecility and childish confusion.

**ROBERT.**—It is very bad form to be always quarrelling, and looking out for slights. It is often wiser to let things pass; but it is always better not to come to an open rupture with people whom you are likely to meet often.

**YOUNG COOK.**—Two eggs, well beaten, one small teaspoon milk, one tablespoonful lard or melted butter, two teaspoonfuls baking powder, and enough flour to make stiff as blouit. Roll out, cut the desired size, and bake in hot oven.

**S. L.**—Dealers in coins will place no value on coins without seeing them. So much depends upon their condition and the special coinage to which they belong that their refusal to do this seems quite just and reasonable.

**PROBY.**—Use the smallest onions. Boil them till they look clear, and when they are quite dry cover them up in jar, with hot, sweet vinegar, flavoured with cayenne and whole black pepper. Or, instead of boiling them, you may cook them in wine for twenty-four hours. Boil them up as carefully as canned fruit.

## THE DYING DAY.

The trees stand brown against the gray,  
 The shivering gray of field and sky;  
 The mist wraps round the dying day  
 The shroud poor days wear as they die;  
 Poor day, die soon, who lived in vain,  
 Who could not bring my love again!

Down in the garden bracken cold  
 Dead rustling stalks blow chill between,  
 Only above the sodden mould  
 The wallflower wears his heartless green,  
 As though still reigned the rose-crowned year,  
 And summer and my love were here.

The ricks creep close about the house,  
 The empty house, all still and cold;  
 The doleful and trembling boughs  
 Scratch at the dripping window sill;  
 Poor day lies drowned in floods of rain,  
 And ghosts knock at the window pane.

**LOLLIE.**—Put three tablespoonfuls of good, fine bran into a mug, jug, or other vessel, pour a quart of boiling water over it, and let it stand covered up for a quarter of an hour; then strain it off, sweeten to taste with sugar, or, better still, with honey, and flavour well with lemon juice.

**ADRIAN.**—Men usually shake hands with one another when introduced. If a man were to be introduced to someone much older than himself, or very distinguished, he would take off his hat. These things depend upon circumstances so much that it is impossible to give any exact rule for them.

**BLANCH.**—Eight ounces ground rice, six ounces of fine sugar, two eggs, half teaspoon milk, grated lemon; beat up the eggs very well, add the milk to this, then stir in gradually the sugar, rice, and grated lemon; put in a prepared cake tin, and bake in a quick oven for about one hour.

**KITTY.**—Take quarter pound icing sugar and rub out all the lumps, put in a small bowl and put in a few drops of lemon juice, and a spoonful of water, just enough to moisten it; mix very well with a wooden spoon until it is smooth; add a drop of saffron, which gives a yellow colour.

**SWAN.**—Three eggs, one tablespoonful flour, half pint milk, two ounces sugar, one ounce raisins, one ounce butter, a little grated lemon; beat up the eggs, and mix with them the milk, flour, and sugar; stir over the fire till it nearly boils; then add the raisins crushed up and the butter and the lemon; it is ready for use when it first comes to boil and pretty thick.

**THIN LOCKE.**—Frequent brushing is very necessary if one would keep the hair in good order, but the brush must not be too harsh or more harm than good will result. There is a decided difference of opinion as to the advantage of most sorts of pomade. Unless the hair is exceedingly dry it is better without any such application.

**GAUCH.**—To become a good conversationalist you can help yourself somewhat by forming a little club of congenial friends and having frequent meetings to discuss matters of mutual interest, preferably the books and characters and authors which you might all study simultaneously. This you would find helpful. But good conversationalists are born not made.

**HARRISON.**—Do not let this young man nor any other ever have a suspicion that you are running after them. In women's reserve lies her strength to awaken love. We do not mean by this that you should be cold, distant, as an iceberg, but that good taste should govern your actions.

**V. B.**—Put two tablespoonfuls of sulphuric acid, common oil of vitriol, in a large basin with about a pint of water; steep the sponge in that for, say, two hours, wring it out several times in the acid, and finally well wash out in clean water. It should then be just like new, having regained its former size, colour and elasticity.

**BEAR.**—Civil engineering is usually considered an excellent business for a young man. Whether or not it is, as learned by home study depends largely upon the student himself. There are persons who can learn languages and, indeed, almost anything else they set out to do. Others make but slow and unsatisfactory progress, and yet others do nothing at all by themselves, and after a little effort give the study up as a failure. Of course it is of the greatest advantage to have the continual supervision of competent instruction, and some authorities contend that really satisfactory progress can be made in no other way.

**HOUSEWIFE.**—The best way to make a whitewash for kitchen walls or ceiling is to begin by putting some cold water in a crock or pail, then gradually break into this sufficient whiting, taking care that all lumps are dissolved; allow to settle, then pour off all the clear water, leaving the cream behind; now have some patent size melted in warm water, equalising in bulk about half that of the soaked whiting; gently stir it into the pail till all is thoroughly mixed, set aside again to cool and settle, when it will jelly; mix with a little cold water next morning, and apply; to prevent a greyish or yellow shade, grind a little indigo or ivory black in water, and add to whitewash before applying.

## The ONLY MEANS for DESTROYING HAIR ON THE FACE.

is by using ALEX. ROW'S ordinary "Depilatory," 2/6; post, 3/6. For strong hair, the Electric Appliance, 3/6. For thick hair, the German Process, 4/6, and Causticising Liquid, 10/6; post, 11/6. His Cantharides produce whiskers or hair on the head. His Skin-Tightener, a liquid for removing furrows and crow's feet marks under the eyes, are each sold at 2/6; by post for 3/0 stamps. The Nose Machine, for pressing the cartilage of the nose into shape, and the Ear Machine, for outstanding ears, are sold at 10/6, or sent for stamps. ALEX. ROW, 77, Theobald's Road, High Holborn, London. Had through all Chemists. Letters replied to in stamped envelope; parcels sent free from obligation.

**Don't Cough-use**

They at once check the Cough  
and remove the cause.

**The Unrivalled**

One Lozenge alone relieves.  
Sold everywhere, 1/6 each.

**Keating's Lozenges**

## OTTEY'S STRONG FEMALE PILLS.

Quickly and certainly remove all obstructions, arising from any cause whatever, where Steel and Pennyroyal fails. Invaluable to women. Post-free, under cover, for 14 and 28 stamps from THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, Burton-on-Trent. Please mention LONDON READER.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post-free Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence. The yearly subscription for the Monthly Part, including Christmas Part, is Eight Shillings and Eightpence, post-free.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of any Booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 440 is Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXIX., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXIX. is now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS to be ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 25, Catherine Street, Strand, W.C.

We cannot undertake to return rejected scripps.

# BEECHAM'S PASTIME PARCEL!

*Big Value for One Shilling, with a Prize Competition for £100.*

The Proprietor of BEECHAM'S PILLS, knowing that most readers of his Advertisements look for something startling at this time of the year, has made up a **SHILLING PARCEL** which will surprise and please all those fortunate enough to get it.

## CONTENTS.

**TWELVE BRIGHT BOOKS**, forming a delightful collection of tasteful and thrilling tales, by various authors of renown, in all 28 complete stories, set in good type, making nearly 600 pages of fascinating reading, and enlivened by over 300 illustrations.

**THREE EXCELLENT SONGS**, very tuneful, with complete music accompaniments, composed expressly for Beecham's Pastime Parcel, entitled "To My Beloved," by Ernest Browne; "A Winter Song," and "Sir Harold the Hunter," by A. G. Colborn.

**ONE BEAUTIFUL ETCHING**, on India paper, representing the charming picture, "A Mother of Three," by Henrietta Ronner, suitable for and well worth framing, being equal, if not superior, to anything sold by the trade for one shilling.

**ONE MOST ARTISTIC TEAR-OFF CALENDAR FOR 1898.** The views on this are very pleasing, and no one will be tired of looking at them each day in the year.

**THE £100 PRIZE COMPETITION.** This is quite a remarkable puzzle competition. Entirely novel and of a fascinating character. It has been arranged in connection with "Beecham's Oracle," an assorted supply of which, **expressly designed for this competition**, will be included in each parcel. The burning of these mysterious puzzle oracles will develop various secrets which each purchaser of Beecham's Pastime Parcels is invited to unravel, and so stand to win the prize of £100. One competition paper (containing all particulars and rules) is enclosed in each parcel.

The demand for the Pastime Parcel will be very heavy, and, of course, the supply is limited. All applications will be dealt with as quickly as possible, the parcels being sent per parcel post, postage paid. Do not be uneasy about a little delay, as the competition will be open until February 5th, 1898.

Apply early, enclose Postal Order or Stamps for ONE SHILLING, writing your name and address clearly, to

*The Proprietor of* **BEECHAM'S PILLS, St. Helen's, Lancashire.**

Cut out this Order Form, it will save you writing a Letter.

To the Proprietor of BEECHAM'S PILLS, St. Helen's, Lancashire.

Please send \_\_\_\_\_

(Name)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Address)

(No.) \_\_\_\_\_

Pastime Parcels. Amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_